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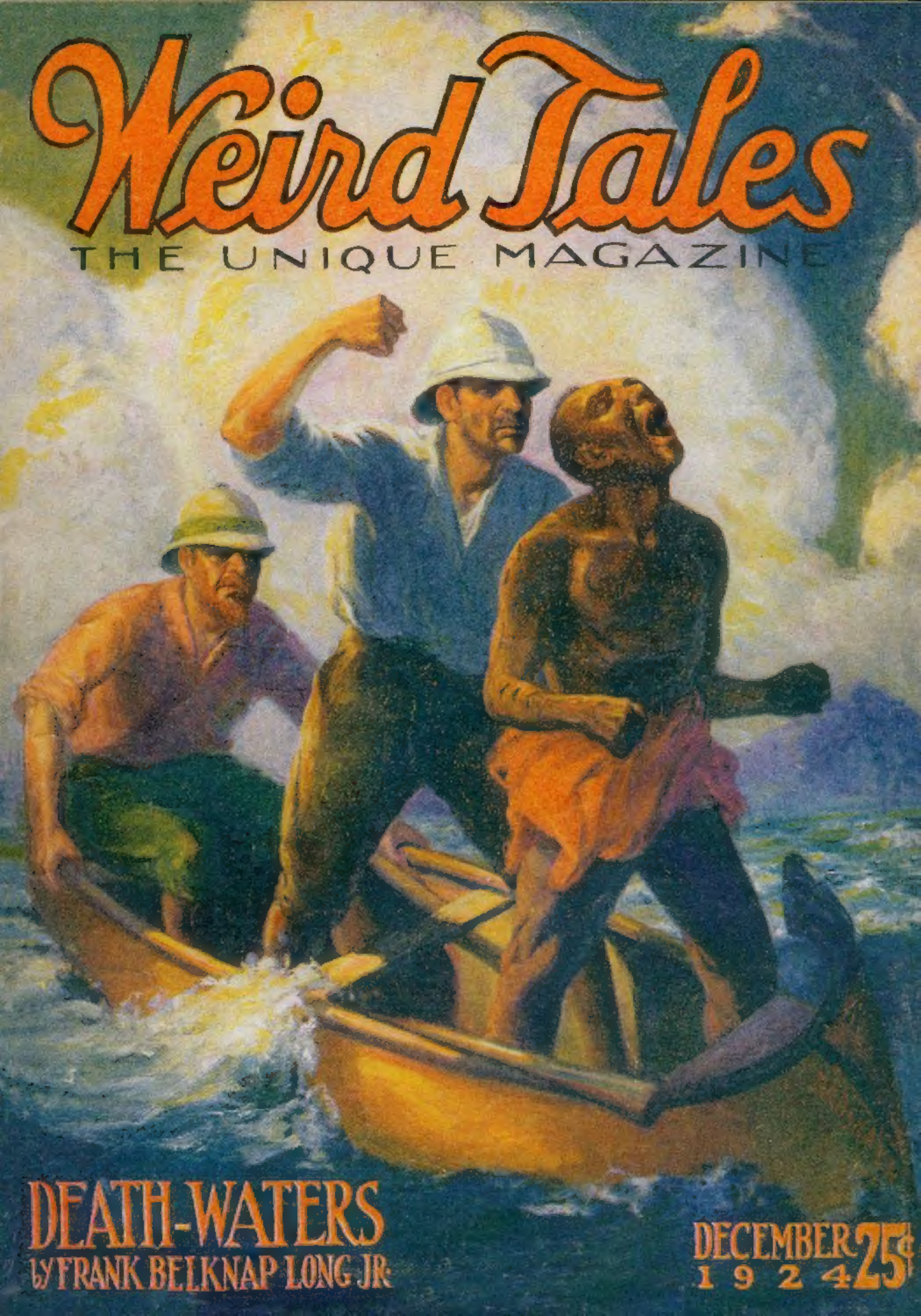

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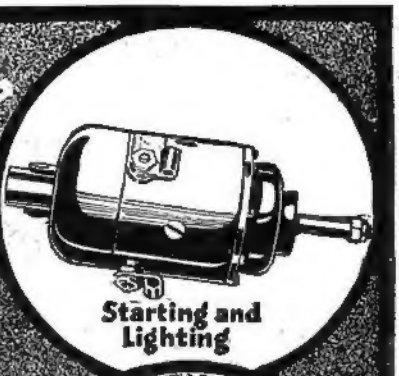

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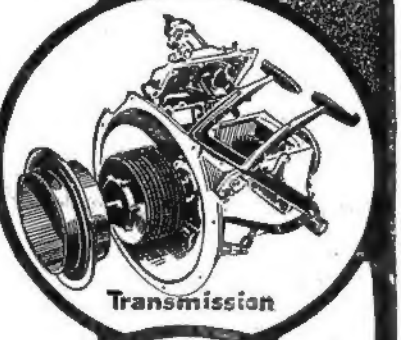

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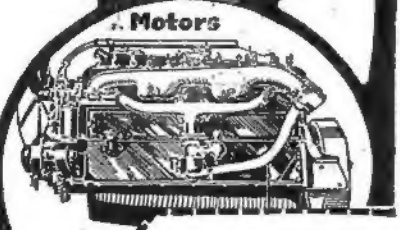

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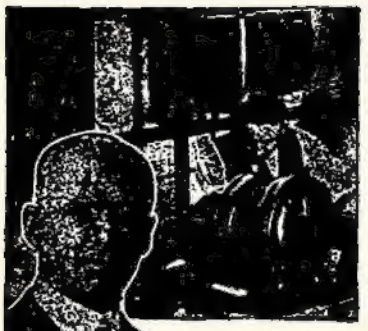

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VOLUME IV NUMBER 4

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DEATH-WATERS

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.

Author of "The Desert Lich"

WE WERE seated in the pilot house of the *Habakkuk*, a queer little tug which carries daily passengers from New York steamers south along the coast of Honduras, from Trujillo to the Carataska lagoon. We were a chatty, odd group. Shabby promoters elbowed enthusiastic young naturalists (botanists from Olanchito, and entomologists from beyond Jamalteca) and tired, disillusioned surveyors from the Plateau. The air was thick with unwholesome bluish smoke from fantastic pipes, which formed curious nimbuses about the heads of the older men. No one had a reputation to lose, and conversation was genial and unaffected.

One of the veterans stood in the center of the cabin and pounded with his fists upon a small wooden table. His face was the color of ripe corn, and from time to time he nodded at his companion. His companion did not return his salutations. The face of his companion was covered; and he lay upon the floor in an oblong box six feet long. No word of complaint issued from the box, and yet, whenever the veteran brought his eyes to bear upon the fastened lid, tears of pity ran rapidly down his cheeks and dampened his reddish beard. But he acknowledged to himself that the tears were blatantly sentimental, and not quite in good taste.

Everyone else in the cabin ignored the existence of the man in the box—perhaps intentionally. A man's popularity depends largely upon his attitude. The attitude of the man in the box was not pleasing, since he had been dead for precisely four days. The veteran choked out his words fiercely between ominous coughs.

"My dear friends, you must be sensible of my embarrassment. It is my opinion that I am not an orator, and it is impossible for me to make you understand. I can explain, but you will never understand. There were millions of them, and they came after *him*. They attacked me only when I defended him. But it was hard—to see him collapse and turn black. The skin on his face shriveled up before he could speak. He never left me a last word. It is very hard—when one is a devoted friend! And yet his perversity was absurd. He brought it upon himself. I warned him. 'The man has a warm temper,' I said. 'You must be careful. You must humor him. It is not good to provoke a man without morality, without standards, without taste.' A little thing would have been sufficient, a small compromise—but Byrne lacked a sense of humor. He paid horribly. He died on his feet, with the nasty things stabbing him, and he never emitted a shriek—only a guggling sob."

The veteran looked reproachfully at the six-foot box, and the ceiling.

"I don't blame you for thinking me queer—but how do you explain this?—and this?" he added, rolling up his sleeve and baring a scrawny brown arm.

We pressed forward and surrounded him. We were eager and amused, and a sleepy Indian in the corner ran his fingers through his fragile black beard, and tittered.

The veteran's arm was covered with tiny yellow scars. The skin had evidently been punctured repeatedly by some pin-like instrument. Each scar was surrounded by a miniature halo of inflamed tissue.

"Can any of you explain 'em?" he asked.

He drummed on the taut skin. He was a tired, nervous little man, with faded blue eyes and eyebrows that met above the arch of his nose. He had an amusing habit of screwing up the corners of his mouth whenever he spoke.

One of the young men took him solemnly aside and whispered something into his ear. The man with the punctured arm laughed. "'Righto!" he said. The young man closed his eyes, and shuddered. "You—you shouldn't be alive." The youth had great difficulty in getting his lips to shape the words properly. "It isn't a bit of all-right, you know! One bite is nearly always fatal, and you—you have dozens of 'em."

"Precisely!" Our man of the scars screwed up his lips and looked piercingly at us all. Some faces fell or blanched before him, but most of the young men returned a questioning gaze. "You know that the culebra de sangre is more certain than the taboba, more deadly than the rattler, more vicious than the corali. Well, I've been bitten ten times by culebras five times by rattlers and thrice by our innocent little friend, the boba.

"I took great pains to verify these facts by studying the wounds, for each snake inflicts a slightly different one. Then how is it that I am still alive? My dear friends, you must believe me when I say that I do not know. Perhaps the poisons neutralized each other. Perhaps the venom of culebra de sangre is an antidote for that of the rattler, or vice versa. But it is enough that I stand here and talk to you. It is enough that I find within me the strength of youth—but my heart is dead."

His last comment seemed melodramatic and unnecessary, and we suddenly realized that the veteran was not an artist. He lacked a sense of dramatic values. We turned wearily aside, and puffed vigorously on our long pipes. It is difficult to forgive these little defects of technique.

The veteran seemed sufficiently conscious of our reproach. But he kept right on, and his voice was low and muffled, and it was difficult to follow the turnings and twistings of his disconcerting narrative. I remember distinctly that he bored us at first, and spoke at great length about things that did not interest us at all, but suddenly his voice became gritty, like the raucous blundering of an amateur with a viol, and we pressed closer about him.

"I WOULD have you bear this constantly in mind: We were alone in the center of that lake, with no human being except a huge black savage within a radius of ten miles. It was risky business, of course, but Byrne was devilishly set on making a chemical analysis of the water just above the source of our spring.

"He was amazingly enthusiastic. I didn't care to parade my emotions in the presence of the black man, and I longed to subdue the glitter in Byrne's eye. Enthusiasm grates upon a savage, and I could see that the black was decidedly piqued. Byrne stood up in the stern, and raved. I endeavored to make him sit down. From a tone of suppressed excitement his voice rose to a shout. 'It's the finest water in Honduras. There's a fortune in it—it means—'

"I cut him short with a cold, reproachful look that must have hurt him. He winced under it, and sat down. I was level-headed enough to avoid unnecessary enthusiasms.

"Well, there we were, two old men who had come all the way from New

York for the privilege of sitting in the sun in the center of a black, miasmal lake, and examining water that would have shocked a professional scavenger. But Byrne was unusually shrewd in a detestable, business-like way and he knew very well that the value of water doesn't reside in its taste. He had carefully pointed out to me that whenever water is taken from the center of a lake directly over a well it can be bottled and sold under attractive labels without the slightest risk. I admired Byrne's sagacity, but I didn't like the way the cannibal in the front was looking at the sky. I don't mean to suggest that he actually was a cannibal or anything monstrous or abnormal, but I distrusted his damnable mannerisms.

"He sat hunched in the bow, with his back towards me, with his hands on his knees and his eyes turned towards the shore. He was naked to the waist, and his dark, oily skin glistened with perspiration. There was something tremendously impressive about the rigidity of his animal-like body, and I didn't like the lethal growth of crisp black hair on his chest and arms. The upper portion of his body was hideously tattooed.

"I wish I could make you perceive the deadly horror of the man. I couldn't look at him without an inevitable shudder, and I felt that I could never really know him, never break through his crust of reserve, never fathom the murky depths of his abominable soul. I knew that he had a soul, but every decent instinct in me revolted at the thought of coming into contact with it. And yet I realized with jubilation that the soul of the monster was buried very deep, and that it would scarcely show itself upon slight provocation. And we had done nothing to call it forth; we had acted reasonably decent.

"But Byrne lacked tact. He wasn't properly schooled in flattery and the polite usages of rational society. He somehow got the queer notion into his head that the water should be tasted then and there. He was naturally averse to tasting it himself, and he knew that I couldn't stomach spring water of any sort. But he had a weird idea that perhaps the water contained a septic poison, and he was determined to settle his doubts on the spot.

"He scooped up a cupful of the detestable stuff and carried it to his nose. Then he gave it to me to smell. I was properly horrified. The water was yellowish and alive with animalcules—but the horror of it did not reside in its appearance. Hot shame flushed scarlet over Byrne's face. I was brought sharply and agonizingly to a sense of spiritual guilt. 'We can't bottle that. It wouldn't be sportsmanship; it wouldn't be—'

" 'Of course we can bottle it. People like that sort of thing. The smell will be a splendid advertising asset. Who ever heard of medicinal spring water without an excessive smell? It is a great feather in our cap. Didn't you suppose that a smell was absolutely necessary?'

" 'But—'

" 'Let us have no "buts" That water has made our fortune. It is only necessary now to discover its taste.'

"He laughed and pointed to the black man in the bow. I shook my head. But what can you do when a man is determined? And, after all, why should I defend a savage? I simply sat and stared while Byrne handed the cup to our black companion. The black sat up very stiff and straight, and a puzzled, hurt expression crept into his dark eyes. He looked fixedly at Byrne and at the cup, and then he looked away towards the sky. The muscles in his face began to contract—horribly. I didn't like it, and I motioned to Byrne to withdraw the cup.

"But Byrne was determined that the black should drink. The stubbornness of a northern man in equatorial latitudes is often shocking. I have always avoided that pose, but Byrne never failed to do the conventional thing under given circumstances.

"He virtually bifurcated the savage with his eyes, and did it without a trace of condescension. 'I'm not going to sit here and hold this! I want you to taste the water and tell me precisely what you think of it. Tell me whether you like the way it tastes, and after you have tasted it, if you feel somewhat out of sorts and a bit dizzy it is only necessary for you to describe your feelings. I don't want to force it upon you, but you can't sit there and refuse to take part in this—er—experiment!'

"The black removed his eyes from the sky and gazed scornfully into Byrne's face. 'Na. I don't want this water. I didn't come out here to drink water.'

"Perhaps you have never seen the clash of two racially different wills, each as set and as primitive and as humorless as the other. A silent contest went on between Byrne and that black imp, and the latter's face kept getting more sinister and hostile; and I watched the muscles contracting and the eyes narrowing, and I began to feel sorry for Byrne.

"But even I hadn't fathomed Byrne's power of will. He dominated that savage through sheer psychic superiority. The black man didn't cower, but you could see that he knew he was fighting against fate.

"He knew that he had to drink the water; the fact had been settled when Byrne had first extended the cup, and his rebellion was pure resentment at the cruelty of Byrne in forcing the water upon him. I shall never forget the way he seized the cup and drained off the water. It was sickening to watch his teeth chatter and his eyes bulge as the water slid between his swollen lips. Great spasms seemed to run up and down his back, and I fancied that I could discern a velvety play of rebellious muscles throughout the whole length of his perspiring torso. Then he handed the cup back without a word, and began to look again at the sky.

"Byrne waited for a moment or two, and then he commenced to question the black in a way which I did not think very tactful. But Byrne imagined that his spiritual supremacy had been firmly established. I could have pointed out to him—but I cry over spilt milk. I can see Byrne now, knee-deep in questions, with his eyes scintillating and his cheeks flushing red. 'I made you drink that water because I wanted to know. It is very important that I should know. Have you ever tasted a bad egg? Did it taste like that? Did it have a salty flavor, and did it burn you when you swallowed it?'

"The black sat immobile and refused to answer. There is no understanding the psychology of a black man in the center of a black lake. I felt that the perversity of nature had entered into the wretch, and I urged Byrne to ease up. But Byrne kept right on, and then finally—it happened.

"The black stood up in the boat and shrieked—and shrieked again. You cannot imagine the unearthly bestiality of the cries that proceeded out of his revolting throat. They were not human cries at all, and they might have come from a gorilla under torture. I could only sit and stare and listen, and I became as flabby as an arachnid on stilts. I felt at that moment nothing but unutterable fright, mixed with contempt for Byrne and his deliberate tempting of—well, not fate exactly, but the inexcusable phenomena of cannibalistic hysteria. I longed to get up, and shriek louder

than the savage, in order to humiliate and shame him into silence.

"I thought at first, as the screams went echoing across the lake, that the black would upset the canoe. He was standing in the bow, and swaying from side to side, and with every lurch the canoe would ship some water. One cry followed another in maddening succession, and each cry was more sinister and virulent and unnatural, and I observed that the devil's body was drawn up as taut as an electric wire.

"Then Byrne began to tug at his shoulders in a frantic effort to make him sit down. It was a hideous sight to see them struggling and swaying in the bow, and I even began to pity the black. Byrne hung on viciously, and I suddenly became aware that he was pummeling his antagonist fiercely on the back and under the arms. 'Sit down, or you'll wreck us! Good heavens! To create such a rumpus—and for a triviality!'

"The canoe was filling rapidly, and I expected her to capsize at any moment. I didn't relish the thought of swimming through a noisome cesspool, and I glared incontinently at Byrne. Poor chap! Had I known, I should have been more tolerant. Byrne deserved censure, but he paid—paid horribly.

"The black devil sat down quite suddenly and looked at the sky. All of his rebellion seemed to leave him. There was a genial, almost enthusiastic expression upon his loathsome face. He leered beneficently and patted Byrne on the shoulder. His familiarity shocked me, and I could see that it annoyed Byrne. The black's voice was peculiarly calm.

"'I didn't mean anything, now. It's just the weather, I guess. I liked the water. I can't see why you shouldn't bottle it, and sell it. It's good water. I have often wondered why no one ever thought of bottling it before. The people who come out here are rather stupid, I guess.'

"Byrne looked at me rather sheepishly. The savage possessed intelligence and taste. His English was reasonably correct, and his manners were those of a gentleman. He had indeed acted outlandishly, and given us good reason to distrust him; but Byrne's tactics had been scurrilous, and deserving of rebuke.

"Byrne had sense enough to acknowledge his error. He grumbled a bit, but in conciliatory mood, and he asked the black to row to shore with a geniality that I thought admirable.

"BYRNE put his hand over the side and let it trail in the water. I lit a cigarette and watched the greenish tide swirl and eddy beneath us. It was some time before I glimpsed the first of the little obscenities.

"I tried to warn Byrne, but he suddenly drew his hand up with a shriek and I knew that he would understand. 'Something bit me!' he said. I fancied that the black scowled and bent lower over his oars.

"'Look at the water,' I replied. Byrne dropped his eyes, rather reluctantly, I thought. Then he blanched. 'Snakes—water snakes. Good Lord! Water snakes!' He repeated it again and again. 'Water snakes. There are thousands! Water snakes!'

"'These are quite harmless. But I never saw anything like this before!' And I was indeed shocked. Imagine an unexpected upheaving of a million nasty little pink river snakes, from dank depths, and without rhyme or reason. They swam about the boat, and stuck their ugly little heads in the air, and hissed and shot out hideous tongues. I leaned over the boat and looked down into the greenish water. The river was alive with myriads of swaying pink bodies, which writhed in volatile contortions, and made the water foam and bubble.

Then I saw that several had coiled themselves over the side of the canoe and were dropping down inside. I felt instinctively that the black devil had something to do with it.

"Such indignities were unthinkable. I stood up in the boat, and stormed. The black lifted his sleepy eyes and grinned broadly. But I saw that he was making directly for the shore. The snakes were crawling all about the boat, and they were attacking Byrne's legs, and their hissing sickened me. But I knew the species—a harmless and pretentious one. Still, the thought of taking them up by the tails and throwing them overboard was repugnant to me. And yet I knew that the noisome things horrified Byrne. He shrieked with the pain of their aggressive little bites and swore immoderately. When I assured him that they were innocuous he eyed me reproachfully and continued to mash them with the heels of his boots. He ground their loathsome heads into a pulp, and blood ran out of their tiny mouths and fairly flooded the bottom of the boat. But more kept dropping over the sides and Byrne had his hands full. And the black rowed fiercely towards the shore, and said nothing. But he smiled, which made me long to strangle him. But I didn't care to offend him, for his methods of retaliation were apt to be unsavory.

"We finally reached the shore. Byrne jumped out with a shout and waded through several feet of black, sluggish mud. Then he turned about on the shore and looked back over the water. The whole surface was covered with swimming pink bodies, and they crisscrossed, and interlaced on the top of the tides, and when the lurid sunlight fell upon them they resembled unctuous charnel worms seething and boiling in some colossal vat.

"I got out somehow and joined Byrne. We were furious when we saw the black push off and make for the opposite shore. Byrne was upset and nearly delirious, and he assured me that the snakes were poisonous. 'Don't be a fool,' I said. 'None of the water snakes hereabouts are poisonous. If you had any sense—'

"'But why should they have attacked me? They crawled up and bit me. Why should they have done that? They were scions of Satan. That black ensorceled them! He called them, and they came.'

"I knew that Byrne was developing a monomania, and I sought to divert him. 'You have nothing to fear. Had we rattlers or culebras de sangre to deal with, but water snakes—bah!'

"Then I saw that the black was standing up in the canoe and waving his arms and shrieking exultantly. I turned about and looked up toward the crest of the hill in back of us. It was a savage hill and it rose wild and bleak before us, and over the crest of it there poured an army of slithering things—and it is impossible for me to describe them in detail.

"I didn't want Byrne to turn about. I sought to keep him interested in the lake, and in the black devil who was standing up in the canoe and shouting. I pointed out to him that the black had made himself ridiculous, and I slapped him soundly on the back and we congratulated each other on our superiority.

"But eventually I had to face them—the things that were crawling upon us from over the somber gray crest of the hill. I turned and I looked at the deep blue sky and the great clouds rolling over the summit, and then my eyes went a little lower, and I saw them again, and knew that they were crawling slowly towards us and that there was no avoiding them.

"And I gently took Byrne by the arm, and turned him about and pointed silently. There were tears in my eyes, and a curious heaviness in my legs and arms. But Byrne bore it

like a gentleman. He didn't even express surprize, although I could clearly perceive that his soul had been mortally wounded, and was sick unto death. And I saw shame and a monstrous fear staring at me out of Byrne's bloodshot eyes. And I pitied Byrne, but I knew what we had to do.

"The day was drawing to a close, amidst lovely earth-mists, which hung over the hill; and blue veils made the water gorgeous and hid the canoe and the gesticulating savage. I longed to sit calmly down there by the water, and to dream, but I knew that we had something to do. Near the edge of the water we found a gleaming yellow growth of shrubs and of stout vegetation, and we made stout clubs and strong cutting whips. And the army of reptiles continued to advance, and they filled me with a sense of infinite sadness, and regret and pity for Byrne.

"We stood very still and waited; and the mass of seething corruption rolled down the hill until it reached the level rocky lake shore, and then it oozed obnoxiously towards us. And we cried out when we counted the number of rattlers and culebras and bobas, but when we saw the other snakes we did not cry at all, for the centers of speech froze up in us, and we were very unhappy.

"My dear friends, you cannot imagine, you cannot conceive of our unhappiness. There were charnel reptiles with green, flattened heads and glazed eyes, which I did not attempt to identify, and there were legions of horned lizards, with blistered black tongues, and little venomous toads that hopped nervously about, and made odd, weird noises in their throats; and we knew that they were lethal, and to be avoided.

"But we met them face to face, and Byrne fought with genuine nobility. But the odds were overwhelming, and I saw him go down, panting, suffocated, annihilated. They crawled up his legs, and they bit him in the back and sides, and on the face, and I saw his face blacken before my eyes. I saw his lips writhe back from his teeth, and his eyes glaze, and the skin on his face pucker and shrivel.

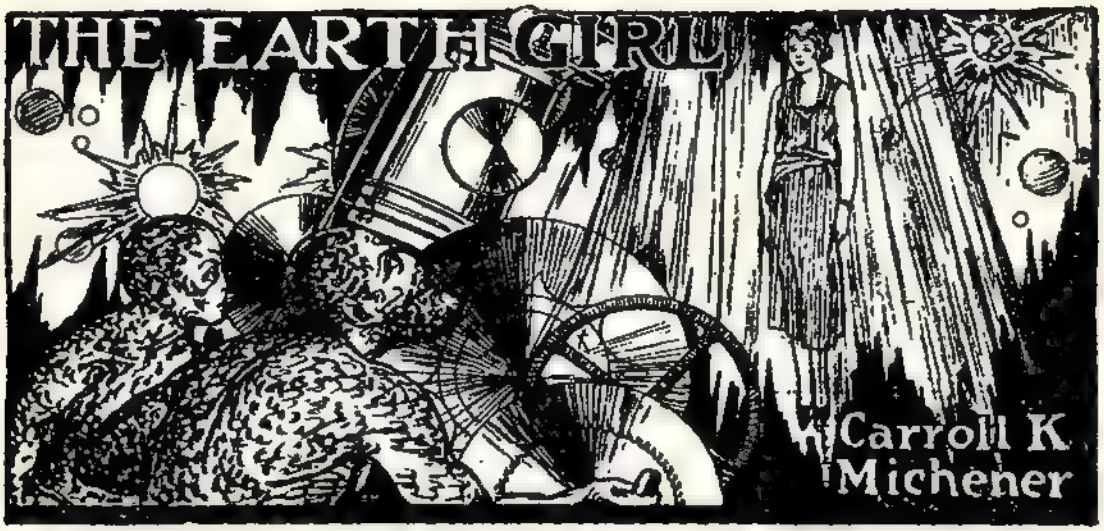
"And I fought to keep them from him, and my club was never idle. I flattened innumerable heads that were round, and I rounded heads that were flat, and I made sickening crimson pellets out of quivering gelatinous tissue.

"MY DEAR friends, they went away at last, and left him there. And the blue calm of the hills seemed inexplicable under the circumstances, but I was thankful for the coolness and quiet, and the deepening shadows. I sat down with peace in my soul, and waited. I looked at the tiny punctures on my arms, and I smiled. I was reasonably happy.

"But my dear friends, I did not die. The realization that I was not to die amazed me. It was several hours before I could be certain, and then I did a shocking thing. I took my beard firmly between my two hands and pulled out the hair in great tufts. The pain sobered me.

"I tramped for two days with the body. It was the decent, the proper thing to do. I waited in Trujillo for the fashioning of the coffin, and I personally supervised its construction. I wanted everything done properly, in the grand manner. I have very few regrets—but my soul is dead!"

There was an infinite misery in the veteran's eye. His voice grew raucous, and he stopped talking. We noticed that he shivered a little as he turned up his collar and went out through the cabin door into a night of stars. We pressed our faces against the glass of the one window and saw him standing before the rail, with the rain and moonlight glistening upon his beard, and the salt spray striking against his incredibly chastened face.



Author of "Six Feet of Willow-Green"

HATTIE LA SALLE, in the opinion of her acquaintances, was always a little unaccountable. In many respects she was, of course, wholly rational, but she was a devotee of the crystal glass, in the rich-draperied parlor of a mystic. There, she was often heard to declaim a strange, somewhat psychic story, and to end it, melodramatically, in these sententious words:

"I, a woman of the Earth, have destroyed a religion, and a city—who knows if I have not destroyed a whole people: the inhabitants of a globe? In the glass I can see it still—always: the flames, the smoke blinding the setting of a scarlet sun, the walls crumbling, the tower falling—falling—"

THE great ninth moon flashed its opaline disk above the horizon, and mounted with dizzying speed toward the zenith. The light of the little blue moon, sailing tranquilly toward its setting, paled in the engulfing brilliance of its huge sister. Presently the smaller satellite effaced itself, leaving the other in full sovereignty of the night sky. The tri-color irregularly splotching the face of this celestial queen began to blend and soften; its patches of green, sapphire and gold were erased by a solid, dazzling hue; and as the orb flared across mid-sky the landscape asleep under it lay flooded suddenly in an almost explosive irradiation.

"The ninth—ah, it is the ninth ray!"

Within the lofty stadium of the observatory, Halvad, master astronomer of the planet Zonomas, was startled into alertness by his pupil's warning.

"Quickly, master! The light is pure—it is the magic ninth tint, and it will fade soon."

Master and pupil entered a domed alcove and busied themselves with a weird instrument. It was an intricate structure of crystal retorts, lenses, disks, and metal standards. A panel in the summit of the dome slid aside noiselessly, flooding the alcove with the vertical shafts of light shed by the satellite blazing directly overhead.

"There is no time to lose," warned the pupil, again. "The little gold moon is due—it approaches already; it will break the spell."

"Thou art impatient—the way of youth," murmured the older man. "There is time. . . . See."

His gesture indicated a row of effigies reclining under a glass canopy.

They were the figures of creatures in the image of his own kind, save that they were palpably of another sex. They were covered delicately with gauze draperies that nevertheless concealed nothing of form and of the waxed rosiness of their simulated flesh. In half light it would have seemed that they lived; in this fierce glare of the searching ninth ray it was apparent that they were but mechanical toys, as symmetrical and idealized as porcelain dolls.

"Look, now, upon the first," commanded the master, lifting his hand slowly to a lever in the strange mechanism by his side. "The great moment has come; we shall see if we have failed again—we shall see—"

A rending flash dizzied them; darkness flooded after it; a burning odor filled the atmosphere, a pungency like that of ozone set free by electric blasts. Then the light returned, dimmed and yellow.

"The little gold moon—we are too late."

"Nay, not so fast," cautioned the old man. . . . "Hear—"

A sound came to them from the shaded interior of the glass canopy. It was the voice of a woman overtaken by sudden, dazed fear.

They lifted the cover, and touched the waxlike limbs that so recently had been of the temperature of marble; they recoiled at the shock of warm flesh that now trembled under their hands.

"As Malamut is god, there is life here—this clay is animate!"

The agitation of the younger man was poignant, denoting the student rather than the adept.

"Thou wouldst not believe, Adathus; thou hadst no faith," the old man chided him.

"But this is beyond faith, beyond belief. Truly, Halvad the magician is mighty. He has proved himself as great as a god, for he has created human life."

"Nay, be not so extravagant," smiled the old man, "for there are loftier marvels than this, as thou shalt hear. Halvad has not created, but merely translated from another sphere."

They lifted the murmuring figure from its slab of marble, wound the slight draperies more securely, and together carried the yielding, pulsing body into an inner room.

Full light disclosed the complete beauty of their handiwork. She was fragilely, angelically fair, the feminine ideal of their race.

She breathed normally. Her eyes opened: vermilion, with gold overlights. Her sandaled feet pressed for support, until she stood free, surveying them.

Perplexity, touched with a shade of awe, a ghost of fear, clouded her features. Her lips opened, and she spoke, haltingly, uttering words that seemed the product of her will, and yet, peculiarly, alien to her thoracic mechanism.

Adathus, the pupil, clearly was stupefied with amazement.

"Can she be—is it true, then, what you have promised?"

"It is true; she is from another world. She is of the planet Madernus, known to its inhabitants as Earth. Knowest thou the number of the universe, as I have taught thee? And the name of the constellation?"

"It is of the constellation Helia, a satellite of the fifth star, Lumnus, which is its sun."

"Thou hast been well taught."

"And she—she is from Madernus, a girl of Earth? She has been plucked through space a distance such as is traversed by light only in a thousand years?"

"Nay, light is a sluggard; by the full spectrum that would have been the period; but the ninth ray knows no time. It has the speed of thought."

They fell silent, looking upon the timorous creature before them. The pupil spoke:

"We are unmerciful, cruel; see, she shrinks with astonishment. Can you not, master, by speech of the mind, soften her fears?"

Halvad looked into his handiwork's fluttering eyes, and the apprehension vanished from their vermilion deeps. A smile rippled her lips. . . .

MADERNA, the Earth Girl, she who had been known in Chicago as Hattie La Salle, arose from the couch on which she awoke, and in the green light of morning looked about her with the puzzled air of one still clouded in the circumstances of interrupted dreams.

Tinted masonry, carved into an unending bas-relief of fanciful, unfamiliar figures, enclosed her spaciously. Tall windows, latticed with a delicate, gleaming metal, permitted the passage of a flood of vernal light. Perfumes impinged vagrantly upon her nostrils.

She advanced toward the windows, but was arrested by a womanly thought: she desired to scan herself in a mirror. Instantly, it was as if she stood outside herself, looking in.

She laughed. This must be a dream. Her features were those of a creature unimaginable. The face was not hers—it was not the thin, unhealthy, pasty face of the Hattie La Salle she knew. Her brow was the same—perhaps deeper; and so were the eyebrows, minus, however, the artful tailoring to which they were accustomed; but the eyes themselves bore an expression utterly new. Their color, of course, was preposterous; they were larger, brighter, filled with a nameless faculty.

The nose—where, indeed, was her nose? . . . It would require the service of the old wizard to explain the gill-like structure flowering, not unbeautifully, in the mid-space where her own wind-freckled and none too classic protrusion should have been.

Lips were not wanting, at any rate; and there was nothing unusual about them, except that they wore an indefinable appearance of inutility. She formed them for the utterance of a word, and found them mute. Only when she put forth the stress of a concentrated effort of will was she able to make the word audible, and then it was by no action of lips or throat; these were peculiarly unresponsive. She amused herself by this new pastime of producing sounds by effort of the will.

Her hair caught her eye. It was of the texture of down, and had the sheen of feathers. It was hair and yet not hair; and, as for color, it was chameleon, reflecting and reinforcing the tint of the morning.

Her fingers ran wonderingly through the soft textures of the transparent garments clinging to her skin—the robe that had been her inheritance from the wizard's laboratory. Not from lack of warmth, but from a motive of instinct, she caught up a cloth from the sleeping-couch and draped herself in its opaque folds. Her bare soles transmitted no sensation of cold from the stone flags.

She looked suddenly at her feet, and was round-eyed for a moment at the fantasm of but two huge toes on each; a thick, warm callus slippered them.

A quick glance at her hands followed, and she was no less naively surprized, for there were not two fingers, or five, on each, but fingers seemingly innumerable, diminishing in size from the normal index to a web-like vanishing-point. She opened her lips on the impulse of laughter—and remembered; then her own conscious effort of mind filled the air with the familiar sound of mirth.

A door opened, and a creature not unlike herself stood forth. Conversation, she now made certain, was not a

matter of language and words, but of mental impulse.

"You called?" was the palpable inquiry of the newcomer.

"No." And yet: "Tell me: am I alive or dead? Have I gone—is this heaven?"

"You speak of things unfamiliar to me; but one may answer, and he is Halvad, the master. . . . You wish food."

The woman, evidently a servant, set a crystal bowl upon a pedestal fronting the windows, so that the rays of the sun fell upon it. She motioned toward it, vanishing as she had come.

Maderna glanced into the bowl, found it filled with a milky liquid, white even against the vernal illumination. She hesitated; then, actuated by an impulse originating not in her mind or memory, but seemingly from this alien flesh so warmly, pulsingly and becomingly clothing her, she looked full into the great, mounting sun of the morning, and, slipping to her knees, lifted the bowl to her lips.

To her earthly sense, the taste was cloyingly insipid. The draft was reminiscent neither of vegetable nor of flesh, but suggested rather the chemical virginity of synthetic laboratories.

The wizard, Halvad, came upon her there, and in his wake Adathus, his pupil. They were not unpleasant to look upon, although the gill-like nostrils, in them, were accentuated, and the feathery down was for them a grosser, more shaggy mane.

"Thou hast inquired if the calamity called death had overtaken thee."

Her ears caught no sound. The master was speaking with the mind, which seemed to possess a language beyond words.

"Come," continued Halvad, "thou shalt see—and know."

She hesitated at another thought—again an inheritance from her earth life. Her cheeks crimsoned, and the mantling glow crept from neck to brow.

The wizard smiled with understanding, but his pupil, struck suddenly shy, and yet eagerly intent upon her lovely confusion, gazed at her soberly.

"We do not concern ourselves here with what upon your Earth is called clothing," explained Halvad. "We have a simpler garb. Attend me now. Observe me clad in what appears to be the skin of a wild beast. . . . But, now—observe me once more. Thou seest a garment such as that bed robe over thy shoulders. That is real, the one upon me is a texture of the mind.

"Ah, no need to look bewildered. This is not so much wizardry as it may seem. The mind, with us in this planet, is a mightier organ than on the more primitive sphere from which thou comest. I read thy thoughts before they are consciously expressed. Soon thou shalt develop that power, too, although at first it will be as if thou wert a little child in these things.

"Some clothing is real, indeed—no need for maidenly alarms! When the mind sleeps, or is impaired, the body must have other garments than those of its illusory creations. . . . Nay, clothe thyself with what thou wilt. Ah! Thou hast the power! Now, look from without. Thou art strange for even my eyes to behold."

Maderna, indeed, stood forth in the sartorial mode of the hour as interpreted in the city of Chicago. She was clothed, not in the garments to which she was habituated, but in the queenly attire embodying her earthly ideals of the dressmaker's art—a costume which hitherto had been for her an aspiration rather than a realization.

She emitted a sigh of delight. This must, indeed, be the feminine paradise!

Suddenly, in the midst of this wonder, she intercepted the gaze of Adathus. There was something ap-

proaching pained fascination in his eyes. It made her self-conscious, and she began to quiz herself, with the frankness of thought, as to whether she had for him a physical attraction. He was not an unhandsome lad. She rather liked him in that tawny skin, so entirely different from any fur she had ever before seen.

Almost in the instant of these reflections she felt panic. The master—perhaps Adathus—had read her thoughts! This was a horrible world; hideous that every fancy of the brain, even half-formed, tentative, intimately secret, should stand naked to all beholders.

"Nay, then," intercepted Halvad; "the mind clothes and conceals itself, just as it clothes the body. Thou wilt learn. . But I recall, now, a matter of serious consequence. Thou shouldst know that on this planet there is no passion of the sexes—our ancient writings call it 'love', just as it is termed on your Earth. This element we have erased from our sociology—it vanished centuries ago. Whence thou comest the race is still torn by its fierce impulses. Ah, I have long known of this through my studies. Thy thoughts just now betrayed thee into a reminder of it."

He looked earnestly from Maderna to Adathus, then he spoke again, soberly:

"Thou shouldst be warned that the passion of the sexes has no place in our peaceful world. We have had no war since the ninth moon joined its sisters—and that is so long as to be beyond thy conception in terms of Earthly seasons. And what is the root of war? It is easy to trace; it runs back through all the material lusts—for food, for raiment, and for power to control the sources of food and raiment—to the very fountain of all desire, the impulse of sex. They deify love on thy planet, little realizing that the primal love—that of man for woman—sits enthroned with the darker sovereign, hate, and that the two drag thee, their slaves, through the hell of strifes and wars.

"But I do not wish to lecture. We have a morning of entertainment before us,—and—thou wilt pardon me—of study. For, my beautiful young woman, no matter how unwillingly, thou hast become a specimen in Halvad's laboratory of cosmic research."

He turned to go, but Adathus stood aside, waiting for her to follow. His eyes were illumined with a feverish curiosity as he continued to gaze upon her exotic charms.

Rousing himself, Adathus held open for her a door, and, as she passed, the odor of heliotrope, strange to his nostrils, flooded faintly toward him from her feathered tresses. He gasped, took a puzzled step toward her, touched her tremblingly.

She smiled, trying to read, if not his tumultuous thoughts, at least the expression of his eyes. Was it possible that this creature of another world, so like her new-molded self, had fallen in love with her, in spite of the Zonomanian tradition that love was extinct?

A moan of terror sounded to her external ear. Adathus recoiled from her. He fled, past the stately figure of his master, and out of sight through a long corridor. Again Halvad turned upon the girl a look of apprehensive and appraising notation.

They emerged upon a plaza open to the sky. Another sun flamed on the horizon now—a sapphire disk, smaller than the huge green one scaling the zenith. Its indigo rays, filtering across the level landscape, which was alike in all points of the compass, as far as the eye could see, tempered the dazzling green to a mild turquoise.

There was heat in the atmosphere, and Maderna put up a pink parasol, an instantaneous fabrication of the mind. She was puzzled to feel the temperature, under its protection, no less keenly than before. The old mas-

ter, observing her surprize, smiled knowingly, then gave her the explanation.

"The clothing of the mind's creation," he said, "is opaque to the eye of both mind and body, but the eyes of the suns know it not. Thy pink shade, therefore, does not protect from the light and heat; nor will thy fantastic Earth garments. The servant should have provided thee with the proper material fabric, the underraiment upon which we build our fanciful garb. We must seek cover quickly, or thy body will suffer from these fierce suns."

A cavernous dome of masonry swallowed them, and Maderna was grateful for its darkened shelter.

What appeared to be a tremendous crystal globe rested airily beneath the dome. There was no other paraphernalia or furnishing.

Without pausing, Halvad walked up to, and seemingly through, the crystalline globe. Whether the globe vanished, as does a burst soap film, she could not tell, for, indeed, everything vanished; the dome was gone, gone was the huge pile of masonry upon which it stood, vanished were the two suns, the sapphire and the green. She stood alone with Halvad, upon nothing, in the midst of nothing. . . . Presently a white light—the familiar white light of her own Earth—surrounded them. A green landscape unfolded; the smudge of a huge city blurred it; these, too, disappeared, and they stood within a familiar room, decorated with the incumbrances common to the professional necromancer. She was conscious of the old man's explaining comment:

"In reality," he was telling her, "we have not left the planet Zonomas; but, as thou seest, we look in upon the familiar surroundings of thy Earthly existence. Further than this thou wouldst not understand; it is a question of the use of forces too vast for thy comprehension. . . . Look about."

The scene within the room developed in detail. Maderna gave a sudden start, and moved impulsively forward.

"With caution," warned the old man. "The emotions are dangerous in these excursions into the infinitudes."

"But there—look! It is I, that figure kneeling before the crystal globe. This room—it was here that I came yesterday."

Fear numbed her syllables.

"I am dead, then," she moaned.

Haltingly she approached the abased, cataleptic image before the enthralling globe. She put out her hand to touch the body that had been hers. It was warm! There was a pulse; there was breath stirring from the nostrils. The eyes were open, fixed, yet unfocused. It was as if time were arrested, and she was witnessing, in the present, an incident of the past. She looked at the old man, inquiringly. He was shaking his head.

"Nay," he said. "It is as thou seest. Thou art not dead."

MADERNA slept through the heat of the triple suns. When she awoke the green orb had set, the one of sapphire swam through the cloudless west, and a tawny shower of light poured down from a golden disk overhead.

There was a vast sound of rushing, reed-like music through the open windows. It rose and fell like a tide, with a range of tone utterly beyond the compass of an Earthly ear.

Maderna clothed herself in a soft afternoon frock, exotic to this sphere, rejecting the garments of real substance that had been prepared against her reawakening. Adathus was in her mind as she stepped through a doorway and walked toward an aisle of ochreous vegetation in the great gar-

den without. All was chromed in shaded baths of color. Golden was the flat landscape; wheat-yellow were the vibrant filaments of sentient, mushroom-like growths about her, and the fanciful, animated flowers reminiscent of her elf-and-fairy days; an incredible, saffron-colored, cylindrical tower lifted its seemingly interminable bulk against the cuprous sky.

Adathus stood before her, under a rubberish tree that seemed leafed with alert and spying ears.

"I fear you," he sighed. "You must not let me touch you. I should go mad. Besides—although you may not understand this—the evil and the madness might not rest with me alone; they might taint the whole race, betray our whole civilization. I am a poor weakling, but if the disease can touch me it may touch others. No doubt I am a degenerate seedling of an ancient generation, of days when men and women on this sphere loved and fought and sacrificed and died to perpetuate themselves, just as now in yours."

Timidly, nevertheless, he braved her provocative smile. He strolled with her through the garden mazes, sheltered from the golden glow of the sun; and she, the eternal feminine, maliciously curtained and uncurtained to him her feminine mind. The result was not salutary to the destiny of the struggling Adathus.

"I like you," she murmured to him. "You are more human than the old man. But are you two and the servant the sole inhabitants of the planet? I want to see things. I've been here nearly a day—by the way, how long are the days here?—and I haven't been outside this old prison."

She glanced at the massive pile of masonry, with its aureate, crenelated walls, glinting dully through the foliage.

"At least," she amended, "I haven't been out of the garden. Take me—I want to see."

Adathus shrank from her.

"Not without asking the master."

She pouted, twitting him, with a tilt of the eye, for his timidity.

"That is not undue subserviency," he protested, "though you are teaching me the word's fullest meaning. You shall have your wish. You shall have anything you wish. . . . If only for a touch of your hand."

He trembled violently.

"I have gone mad. . . ."

They walked, hand in hand, toward a gate in a wall. They stood before it for a moment, and, as if at a thought suddenly clothed with force, it opened. They stepped through, and the gate closed behind them.

Maderna was conscious of a sudden cessation of the music that had filled the air in the garden.

"It was the trees—they are intelligent beings here," was his answer to her half-spoken question. "We have no animals such as these the master has represented to me from among those of your planet; and the trees are our musicians. They have ceased to play because you are gone."

"And where are we going?"

"You want people—you shall see them."

A city, strangely inhabited, strangely built, precipitously unrolled itself before her. She was conscious of motion, without having given volition to the desire for movement, and listened, with surprize, for Adathus' explanation.

"It is a power of which you know nothing, save this: You understand the lines of force about a magnetic field? This is the same, and yet not the same. We are propelled without a vehicle, without a material medium. But the details would scarcely interest you. Women, even among ourselves, have not mechanical minds."

Maderna gazed with the keenest of attention, however, upon the kinetoscopic picture before her. The clasp of Adathus' hand tightened, and the

mysterious force that propelled them relinquished its irresistible upward and forward compulsion. They had not appeared to leave the ground, yet now they seemed to step down from some invisible moving platform.

They were in an immense square, plashing with fountains, scintillant with huge domes of crystal, from which irradiated wavering, changing lights. Around them, on all sides, was an architectural symposium unreal to any Earthly eyes. Pillars, the diameters of which could have been measured only in hundreds of feet, supported colossal structures, winged and buttressed with masonry of unimaginable massiveness. It was impossible, from the network of trusses, cantilevers, and domed superstructures, to say whether there was in this vista one or a series of buildings. The very square, perhaps of a thousand acres, was roofed with a transparent, artificial vault, which nevertheless had some semblance of sky itself—it was blue, tinting the great square with a gentle cerulean.

"We are in the industrial center of Zonomas," Adathus was explaining. "There are only three commodities with which we are concerned: food, raiment, power; heat is a mere problem of translating solar radiation to whatever part of the planet requires it, principally the poles. All these things are matters of community enterprize. The labor, which is merely a process of giving direction to natural forces and to our manual agencies, which, with us, are lower orders of beings corresponding somewhat to your plant life, is compulsory and without compensation. The entire population shares in it. Food is a matter of synthetic composition; you have tasted: it is all alike, and necessary only at infrequent intervals; no living creature loses its life, as on your planet, in the preparation of it. Here, it offers no incentive to strife, ambition, crime. As for clothing, you have heard something from the master concerning that. A species of plant produces a fiber from its own composition, and through its own agency converts it into the basic fabric used in Zonomanian raiment. It serves for protection to the skin from heat and cold. It is furnished by the community, and is not subject to buying and selling. The variety you see in the people about you is real only as a manifestation of their individual mind-forces. Underneath the colors and forms of raiment disclosed to you there is but a single, unvarying, primitive fabric."

There was more, an astounding lecture confusing to her mind. So at length he came to an embarrassed pause.

"I weary you with all this," he said. "And, in truth, I should prefer to speak only of ourselves, and of love. I am not so certain as Halvad of our civilization. Though we have banished love, hate remains; for there is superstition and ignorance. The people fear Halvad. He has done strange things, and has great powers, some of them known not even to the Yeomers, priests of Malamut, who are our rulers. You see, we are not so unlike you of the Earth—we must have our rulers and our priests."

A shadow touched them swiftly, and Maderna gave a cry of apprehension. Adathus was quick to assure her.

"Do not be afraid—you will not be injured."

A row of mighty shapes columned toward them across the square; they were like the detached legs of grotesquely magnified elephants, or like a close-ranked caravan of waterspouts, heads vaguely diffused aloft. They advanced relentlessly, casting a yellowish shadow before them, the shadow thrown by smoky, tenuous semi-opacity. The Earth Girl and her companion were engulfed in this procession; it passed through them,

around them, over them, and left them as they were.

"The sweepers of our artificial sky," explained Adathus, leading her again into the streams of straight-lined traffic surrounding the square.

The people were gorgeous in their fanciful raiment. They drifted like butterflies. The tremendous buildings yawned them forth, and engulfed them again.

"It's odd that you don't fly here," Maderna suggested.

"Fly? No need of it. Transportation is not a problem—we have no need of improving or diversifying it."

"Are you taking me—home?" she asked, presently.

Adathus gave a start, and trembled anew under the touch of her hand on his arm.

"Where else? The master may miss us."

She pouted, quite in the Earthly fashion.

"But you haven't shown me all. There is the great tower—the one visible from the garden. I want to see that."

"The Tower of Malamut!" exclaimed Adathus. "That is impossible. You do not understand. It might mean death to us both."

Her lips rippled to the accompaniment of her careless laughter.

"You only increase my curiosity," she coaxed.

He shook his head, gravely; but the touch of her hand grew to an appealing clasp; her vermilion eyes were close to his; her breath was on his cheek. . . .

THEY stood in a swift current that bore them through architectural canyons, among sounds of titanic enterprize, past enchanted gardens filled with music, under changing hues that merged gradually into the unaltered light of the golden sun, now flaring reddishly toward its point of setting. . . . .

They stood in open country, at the edge of a shallow and seemingly illimitable bowl, from the center of which rose the tower. At first the eye refused to credit the fact that the bowl was filled, overflowing, with people in a reclining, half-prone posture, looking aloft toward a point where tower and sky appeared to merge. There was no motion, only a sea of inactivity, heightened by blended color into a vista somewhat resembling a mirage. The people were as numerous as the sands.

"They are worshiping Malamut, who in turn instructs them," explained Adathus. "This is our only school, this is our fount of knowledge. We must do as the rest—change our garments into a semblance of theirs."

Music, with a vaster melody than that of the garden, sounded from aloft. Through it came a voice, and the multitude was hushed, hypnotized.

"Fools," murmured Adathus, speaking close to Maderna's external ear, for greater secrecy. Then, as if in soliloquy: "The tower is not topless, as they think. The master knows. He has shown me the way. We have been there—at the top—in the Chamber of the Light."

"Oh, take me, take me!" urged the Earth Girl.

"We shall die, then," answered Adathus.

"Perhaps we are already dead; this is all surely a mere dream—it can scarcely matter," she persisted, half serious at his warning.

He looked into her eyes, doubtfully, sadly.

"If you would only tell me," he began.

"What do you wish me to say?"

But he was silent. Slowly a faint flush overspread her cheeks.

"Is it possible," she asked, boldly, "that you are a reaction from your loveless civilization? Do you want me to say that I—that I love you?"

He nodded, then turned shamefully away.

"You still wish to go into the tower?" he asked.

"I am not afraid; I love you, Adathus."

MADERNA, femininely, did not think of the wall's vastness in terms of yards and feet; for her it was simply unthinkably huge, rising sheer upward from its metallic foundation, to form one blind, curved face of the tower. Looking aloft, at an arm's length from its masonic surface, the tower wall before which she waited for Adathus seemed to lean far outward from the perpendicular, threatening her dizzily with its bulk.

She waited alone, beneath the edge of the metallic cup, set below the floor of the amphitheater, so that she was out of sight of the multitude, with nothing to see save the magnitude of the preposterous stone needle that filled half of the lambent, golden-sunned sky.

He came, nervously a-tingle, exhibiting a small instrument not unlike a miniature harp.

"Without this it would have been impossible," he breathed. "The master saw me as I left his apartment, but I think he is without suspicion. The second of his images—like you—is to be animated tonight, at the coming of the ninth ray. He has sworn to people his laboratory with samples of human life from every adjacent universe. But we must waste no time."

With a careful step, Adathus measured a distance along the wall, from a starting point that was to her undiscernible; he appeared to be engaged, simultaneously, in a puzzling mathematical computation; when he had finished, he looked about him anxiously, stood a short way from the masonry, and was satisfied that his proceedings had not been observed. . . . He held Maderna close to his side.

"It is necessary for you to follow me implicitly—to do whatever I say. Forget that the wall is there. Close your eyes—that will help you. Now, walk forward with me, boldly."

They took several steps, Maderna with her eyes obediently shut. To her surprize they moved onward, unimpeded, as if away from the wall. It was as if there had been no wall. She opened her eyes and beheld a low-ceilinged interior, filled with gross metallic implements, some as huge as a steamship—gigantic suggestions of the iron-and-steel handiwork of her own Earth.

"Part of the state's historical archives—the age of machinery and metals," explained Adathus hurriedly. "These are relics of centuries ago, when your Earth race had not yet emerged from the ooze of the seas."

They hurried past weird monsters, and brushed the cobwebbed reminders of what must have been a mighty period. A corridor swallowed them, and at the end of it was a blind wall. Again they paused, Maderna half expecting this one, too, to prove of the substance that is pervious to magic. Adathus drew forth the tiny instrument that resembled a harp, set it to his lips, and blew across its strings. A harmony wafted faintly from them, a concord of sound utterly etheric.

Slowly the wall dissolved before them. . . .

They were in a rectangular well, the upward dimension of which appeared limitless. It was suffused with a pale, violet light. Maderna touched the wall nearest her, curiously, and felt it slide downward, swiftly, against her pressure. An expression of tenseness in the face of Adathus warned her to remain immobile and silent. They continued to move rapidly upward, as if the floor of the well had been suddenly levitated by some master impulse. After what seemed an endless suspension upon nothing more substantial than rarefying atmosphere, a

narrow panel in the encompassing masonry appeared to pause before them. Adathus nervously urged his companion forward through it, and followed.

A corridor led inward, widening; but Adathus turned her aside into what seemed merely a niche. It was, in fact, the blind opening of another and smaller alley, at the end of which blazed a piercing light. They stood, with dramatic suddenness, before the holy symbol of Malamut.

A balcony held them above it, screened them with a semi-lucent shield from the actinic ferocity of the flowing light. The source, the very godhead of Zonomas, was a limpid cone of fire, set in a massive frame; its substance seemed that of flame, and yet of precious metal; it appeared radiant with an overpowering heat, and yet cold as the light of jewels.

"Force," murmured Adathus. "It is the source—or, at least, the symbol—I do not know which—of the great energies that have stripped our existence of its primitive ways."

Maderna laughed.

"What is that," she asked, without replying, "before the great lamp of Malamut? It looks like an offering."

"It is another evidence of our superstition; a relic of forgotten generations. It is, indeed, an offering; formerly it was one of flesh and blood."

"Fruit—that's all it is," insisted Maderna. "I'm hungry. Adathus, for a taste of it, I would—well, what would you ask of me?"

"I have heard your legend of Evè—and laughed at it, until now. How odd that we should have no such legend here. . . . I ask your love, that is all; and that you will test me no more."

Like one who is fevered with something of dementia, and against her belated cry of regret, he darted down the steps toward the furnace of light, shielding his eyes with an uplifted arm, and bore back with him a globule of tawny fruit.

She kissed his ashen lips, as one kisses a playful and obedient child, and buried her wilful teeth in the food of a god.

A hand snatched it from her; another seized her, and pinioned her arms. Adathus, paling with the despairing fear of death, was captive no less securely than herself.

"A woman," muttered the priestly figure at her side, half releasing her arms in order to gain a better view of her face. "A woman, Adathus—ah, thou art recognized—and as thou knowest, it is a crime against Malamut for one of her sex to enter the temple and to look upon the sacred flame."

"We have heard, Adathus," spoke the other captor, "that Halvad has created this woman—molded her flesh and animated the body with spirit. . . . That is the truth, then? . . . Halvad shall die—so shall ye all."

THEY were led into a spacious hall, windowed to the four dimensions of the horizon and open to the roof of the heavens. A mirror-like ledge, beveled against the windows, offered a magnificent view of the amphitheater circling the tower. It was like gazing into a poppy field; the white faces below were like the petals of a botanical mosaic.

A sacerdotal personage, joined by a larger group that now made the captives a center of attention, spoke sonorously into a simple instrument resembling a megaphone.

"A woman has profaned the shrine of Malamut."

The voice paused, as if awaiting a dramatic effect upon its reclining audience. A murmur arose from the bowl, then ceased.

"The woman is in the hands of Malamut, awaiting her judgment. What shall be done with her?"

A mightier, angrier murmur rose in response. It was unintelligible with suggestions; gradually the cry developed:

"Toss her—toss her from the tower!"

Again the sacerdotal voice was heard:

"A man has betrayed Malamut—he has played treason with the woman."

The verdict was swifter:

"Toss him—toss him to the bowl!"

"He is the dupe, the disciple of Halvad."

The name of the magician stirred their waiting silence to new thunders of decision. Halvad inspired fear, yet ferocity.

"He is in his observatory. What is your will of him?"

"Burn him—burn his castle!"

They were away, like the swarming of infuriated insects. The priests of the temple watched them go, and were gratified. Then they turned to the captives.

"Out with them—over the wall," they commanded, and certain among their number stepped forth for the task. . . .

Halvad it was, who stood suddenly, miraculously, before the condemned pair, shielding their embrace from these doomsmen stretching forth envenomed hands.

The air was electric with exclamation.

"So goes all civilization," said Halvad, grimly. "Centuries of progress leading to a moment of destruction. And usually, as now," (he smiled cynically as he glanced at the Earth Girl), "usually the agent is a woman, and the agency that ancient impulse that destroys even as it perpetuates: the love of man for woman, woman for man."

He turned, suddenly, fiercely, upon the Yeomers.

"Thou hast set them against my castle. They will use the flame invented for the last war—the war that stopped all wars; the flame that crumbles walls of rock. Wait. . . . They cannot be stopped. Thou hast trained them too well with thy priestly superstitions. Presently, when the flames begin to mount—ah, they are rising. See. . . . Presently there shall emerge from the flame that which will destroy the city in a single blast. I had not intended it for this—Malamut is my witness—it was for the peaceful business of sounding the cosmic universe. . . . The tower—who can say whether the tower itself will not fall?"

They heard him mutely, and looked with a desperate awe upon the destruction of Halvad's laboratory.

A TREMOR, like the shock of colliding strata in geological upheavals, shook the tower. There was a lightning glimpse of the city, mangled, magically ruined, its marvels and majesties splintered into dissolute wreckage; then an appalling sound overwhelmed them—the sound of the catastrophe, arriving in belated confirmation of what their eyes had seen.

The tower stood. . . .

Halvad, bearing the look of one unutterably saddened, led them toward the room of the fiery shrine.

"Perhaps, after all, it was destiny, and no great fault of mine," he said. "But what a trivial end for a mighty civilization."

They watched him as he strode toward the bronze setting of the Malamutian jewel, flashing its cold, unbearable fire; they saw him mount the supporting circle of brass, and step into the flame. . . . They saw him vanish, saw the flame die, found themselves in a deathly darkness.

The walls of the tower trembled, disintegrating. The vast pile swayed, no longer tenanted by its supporting force. . . . The tower was falling. . . . falling . . . .

WITH WEAPONS OF STONE

A TALE OF THE CAVEMEN

by C. M. Eddy Jr.

Author of "Ashes," "The Ghost-Eater," etc.

THE Great Cliffs teemed with bustle and confusion. From every one of the subterranean chambers that honeycombed the rocky escarpment poured a steady stream of men and women. Tottering age and toddling youth with all the intermittent ages were represented in this stream of humanity that the caverns discharged. They made their way with one accord to the clearing at the foot of the cliffs, for Gra, chieftain of the tribe, had summoned them, and when Gra summoned they must heed his call.

At the far end of the clearing, on a crude throne of huge rocks, sat Gra. His massive frame was clothed in the shaggy coat of the mighty cave bear, and in his hand he bore a gnarled and knotted staff tipped with a monster lance-head of stone. On his right stood Gra, son of Gra, tall, lithe and powerful, a perfect specimen of physical manhood. On his left sat Zo-na, fairest daughter of all the tribe of Gra.

Gra looked down into the semicircle of upturned faces and raised his hand. A hush fell upon the waiting throng. Gra spoke in short, monosyllabic sounds, amplified by many eloquent signs and gestures, for the art of speech was young and undeveloped and the primitive mind often groped long in the darkness before it found expression. It could not be accurately transcribed. The nearest one can come to it is to record the ideas, expressed by the combination of sounds, expressions and gestures.

"It has long been a custom with the people of Gra that, when a youth desires to mate with a woman of his people, his desire should be made known before the tribe in the great council.

"Long, too, have we given the woman the right to choose whether or not she would mate with the man who seeks her, for are not the best children borne by the woman who mates with the man of her choice?

"And now Gra, son of Gra, seeks a mate, that his race shall not cease to live upon the earth. And from the women of the people of Gra, now Gra, son of Gra, seeks to mate with Zo-na, daughter of Dur, who with his naked hands has slain the mighty cave bear."

Gra's ponderous voice echoed and reverberated as he reached the end of his oration. The crowd broke into excited chattering as he paused, but fell

silent again as the girl stood before them at a sign from Gra. Her voice was musical and clear as a bell, and her words were simple and free from all pomp and ceremony. She looked across to where Gra, son of Gra, stood with his eyes fastened intently upon her, before she spoke:

"Zo-na waits the voice of her people."

A lone figure detached himself from the crowd and, crossing the open space to Gra, prostrated himself before the throne of stone. Gra rose, and again his thunderous tones rang forth:

"Arise, Ra-nor, stalwart son of the people of Gra, and state your mission."

Ra-nor arose and drew himself erect.

"For many moons, O Gra, has Zo-na found favor in the eyes of Ra-nor. And has not Zo-na smiled upon him in return? So Ra-nor would seek the girl, Zo-na, to mate with him, to keep his watch-fires bright, to care for the trophies he brings from the hunt, and to be the mother of his children."

An intense hush fell upon the assembled throng. Ra-nor was entirely within his rights, according to the tribal customs of the people of Gra. But to think that he dared defy the wishes of Gra, son of Gra, was in effect a daring challenge. The girl must choose, and her choice must be confirmed by the council congregated there. If their verdict did not concur with her own, she must remain a virgin until another should find favor in her eyes, or else flee with the man of her choice and become ostracized forever from the people of Gra. So far had men progressed from the days when the male, by sheer brute force, took the female of his choice to his cave.

Again the girl took her place before the multitude. Every eye was focused upon her, every ear intent on the words she might have to say. Gra, son of Gra, moved uneasily, but his face remained as emotionless as the pictures graven on the walls of his cave.

"Zo-na needs must find it hard to make a choice, for Gra, son of Gra, and Ra-nor both find favor in her eyes. But this is the answer of Zo-na to Ra-nor, and to Gra, son of Gra. Many times of late has the voice of Aa, the saber-tooth tiger, been heard in the mighty forest. Already have some of the brave hunters of the people of Gra fallen prey to the great beast. More dangerous is he than Brahg, the woolly mammoth, or even Gur, the shaggy cave bear. To him who will lay before her cave the head of Aa, with this one shall Zo-na mate. Zo-na has spoken."

Now the silent throng found voice and raised a mighty shout of approval at the decision the girl had made. Gra lifted his hand once more for silence.

"Words of wisdom has the fair Zo-na spoken. It is well. Tonight the full moon shines upon the people of Gra. It is a good sign. Tomorrow shall Ra-nor and Gra, son of Gra, set out upon the trail of the great beast, Aa. And until one returns, Zo-na shall wait in the cave of her father, Dur. If neither should return from the great forest. . . ."

Gra's massive shoulders moved in a suggestive gesture. With a wave of his huge staff he dismissed the throng.

That night Zo-na's sleep was troubled. She dreamed that she was alone in the great forest and Aa, the saber-tooth tiger, sprang upon her from the underbrush. But instead of the head of a tiger, the monster in her dreams bore the head of Gra, son of Gra. She woke with a startled cry, the name of Ra-nor on her lips, and in her heart a fear that harm might befall this brave lad who dared defy the mighty son of Gra.

Ra-nor, too, dreamed, but his dreams were all of a glorious girl with

raven tresses and wonderful sloe-black eyes. And in those eyes gleamed the wonder-light of the great love, and he knew that this woman was his mate as surely as he knew that his only foe would be not only the terrible Aa.

But Gra, son of Gra, did not dream. His heart was filled with a great hate for the one who had dared to interfere with his plans; for Gra, son of Gra, did not wish to hunt the great beast, Aa. Much rather would he remain in the sanctuary of Gra, his father, and bask in the pleasant plaudits of the admiring crowd as he strutted proudly about, garbed in his garment made from the shaggy coat of the mighty cave bear. Far into the night he lay awake, scheming, planning, plotting, seeking some way he might win the girl, Zo-na, and yet not jeopardize his own precious hide.

With the rising of the sun, Ra-nor slipped quietly away into the great jungle that lay between the Great Cliffs and the sea. But Gra, son of Gra, was not so simply satisfied. He, too, rose with the first rays of the morning light, and made his way to the cave of Na-nor, the flint-maker. From his store he selected the best weapons he could find: a stone ax, a keen-tipped lance, and a long, needle-like dagger of stone that had caused Na-nor many an unsuccessful attempt before he had obtained his objective. Then he breakfasted before the cave of Gra, his father, on the flesh of reindeer, and listened to the many words of council that the old chieftain spoke into his ears. Then, leisurely, conscious of the many eyes that were upon him, Gra, son of Gra, entered the jungle.

And Zo-na, as she watched him take his leave, again experienced that odd sensation of impending disaster, that strange foreboding of danger for the one who had gone on before him into the mighty forest.

2

THE noonday sun shone down upon the lone figure of Ra-nor, as he plodded on into the trackless jungle, searching out the spoor of the great beast, Aa. His eyes scanned every inch of the ground over which he passed, reading the signs as plainly as if it were a printed page; here was where Gur, the shaggy cave bear, had passed; there, where the foliage was crushed and trampled, the woolly mammoth had crashed on its cumbersome way.

On, and still on, sometimes going on all fours, his nose close to the ground that his keen sense of smell might detect the presence of Aa, even if his sharp eyes failed to do so. At last the troglodyte came to the spot where the trail of the great cat crossed his own and he pressed on with redoubled speed. The trail led him to where the great, fernlike trees grew on the sides of the cliffs until it came to an end at the mouth of a large, dark cave. The mouth of the cave was littered with clean-picked bones of reindeer, bison, mammoth, even the bones of the cave bear.

Here, indeed, was the lair of Aa, the mighty saber-tooth tiger, who already had robbed the people of Gra of three stalwart sons. Perhaps, thought Ra-nor, their bones, too, were in that gruesome pile. He found a stone about the size of his hand and hurled it into the recesses of the cave. His only answer was the sound of the missile as it struck one of the walls. Evidently Aa was not at home. So much the better. For some time Aa must return, and he would find a warm welcome awaiting him.

Ra-nor climbed into the branches of a tree from which he could command a view of all the approaches to the cave, and waited until the shadows of the night began to fall, but Aa did not return. Boldly, Ra-nor crept into the very lair of the huge cat and made his bed on the floor of the cave.

He knew that no beast other than Aa would disturb him, for all would give a wide berth to the cave of the great beast. All through the long night he kept up his vigil, while not a hundred feet above him, in a cavern that might have been a mate to the one he occupied, slept Gra, son of Gra.

He, too, had traversed the big forest, but little care had he given to the trail of Aa. Instead, he had followed the trail that Ra-nor had blazed. Let Ra-nor track the great beast to his lair; he would follow on at his leisure. Let Ra-nor spend his strength battling with the tawny animal; it was far easier to wrest spoils from a man already spent with a mighty struggle than to risk life and limb in an effort to take for himself the head of Aa. It was far simpler to overpower a fellow man than a monster with the strength of ten men.

He had overtaken Ra-nor as the latter came in sight of the cave of Aa. When Ra-nor had taken up his post in the branches of the big tree, Gra, son of Gra, did a little scouting of his own and found the cave above, where he planned to spend the night. He dared not risk a fire, for the smell of smoke might warn the other of his presence.

Morning found Ra-nor again in his perch among the branches of the tall tree. Beneath the overhanging boughs the life of the jungle passed in an incessant stream. Chattering monkeys swung from limb to limb; huge, hideous, hairy apes, with misshapen bodies and slavering jaws, pushed their way through the underbrush. From the distance came the howling, devilish cry of the hyenas and the answering bellow of the stag. Ra-nor could picture the persecuted animal fighting against overwhelming odds, and the pack of hungry brutes snapping and biting at him from all sides.

Ra-nor became conscious that he was hungry. For two days and a night he had been without food. He heard the challenging growl of Gur, the shaggy cave bear, as he lumbered into sight through the trees. Here was food enough for more than one satisfying meal. Another moment and the animal would be directly beneath his tree. The hungry man steeled himself for the attack.

Then, through the great forest, came an answer to the challenge of Gur—the blood-curdling cry of the great beast, Aa. Never would Gur let the voice of his life-long foe remain unanswered. The bear turned in the direction of the sound, and rumbled defiance to the mighty Aa. Again the voice of Aa echoed through the trees.

Ra-nor drew into the sheltering foliage of the tree until only his eyes were visible. His keen ears could detect not a sound. Over the great forest fell a silence fraught with expectancy and dread. The cave bear sniffed the air and shook his huge bulk savagely, rearing upon his hind quarters and focusing keen, penetrating eyes upon the surrounding jungle.

A sudden swish, a crashing through the trees, and the mighty body of Aa came hurtling through the air, landing full upon the broad shoulders of Gur. Then the silence was broken with a terrible commixture of sounds as the two beasts battled for supremacy, a snarling, growling, tangled mass of flying flesh and fur. At last the curved fangs of the great cat, fully eighteen inches long, sank deep into the throat of Gur, and Ra-nor knew that it was the beginning of the end. Finally the shaggy body of Gur lay still, and through the jungle rang the triumphant cry of Aa. Again a long and intense silence as the victorious animal settled itself to its feasting.

But Aa did not long feast uninterrupted. Noiselessly, moving even more silently than the mighty beast below him, Ra-nor lowered himself to the ground within a few rods of where the tail of Aa switched through the air, and hurled his lance powerfully into

the body of the monster, full between the shoulder-blades. With an angry snarl the great beast turned, but quicker yet was the bold hunter as, with the agility of a monkey, he gained the sanctuary of the big tree.

Aa crouched, ready to spring upon his new foe, his tail cutting great arcs through the air. His long fangs dripped blood and his body was cut and bleeding from the struggle with his late antagonist. Aa's huge body swayed from side to side, and with a cry he leaped straight for the branches of the tree where Ra-nor waited. There the great cat met the stone ax of the troglodyte cleaving into its skull, between the eyes.

Again, and yet again, the mighty beast sprang. Each time the man in the tree met his attack with crushing counter-blows. Once the claws of Aa struck the shoulder of the daredevil, ripping his flesh open clean to the bone and nearly dislodging him from his lofty perch.

Now blood streamed from the mouth and nose of the great beast, and Ra-nor knew that his shafts had found a vital spot. Throwing caution to the winds, the man dropped lightly to the ground and closed in upon the spent and wounded Aa. A last terrific effort and the lifeless body of Aa slumped in an inert mass beside the shaggy form of its victim, Gur.

Forgetful of his own wounds, intent only upon making sure of the prize that was to win for him the hand of Zo-na, Ra-nor set about his task of severing the head of Aa from its body.

From his vantage point at the mouth of the upper cave, Gra, son of Gra, had watched the struggle. Now was his opportunity. One well-directed blow and the prize would be his. The story he would tell was plausible enough to pass the dwarfed, childish minds of the people of Gra: how he had come upon Ra-nor struggling with the great beast Aa; how Aa had killed the other man before he, Gra, son of Gra, could lend his aid; and how he had meted out vengeance for the death of his tribal brother by slaying, single-handed, the great jungle terror.

Stealthily he wormed his way through the tangled underbrush until he came near enough to reach out and touch Ra-nor with his hand. From his gee-string he selected the long, sharp, needlelike stone dagger that had been the pride of Na-nor the flint-maker. Slowly, deliberately, he gaged the distance between himself and his unsuspecting victim and lifted the dagger of stone high above his head. One blow and Gra, son of Gra, would be mighty among the people of Gra; one blow and the fair Zo-na would be his mate; one blow and the upstart Ra-nor would be forever removed from his path.

3

ZO-NA, in the cave of her father, Dur, waited impatiently for the return of the victor with the head of Aa. Deep in her heart lurked a longing that Ra-nor would be the one to lay the trophy at her feet, but should it be the other. . . Zo-na had given her word.

All day long she paced to and fro about the confines of the dwellings, like some hunted beast at bay. She could not shake off her evergrowing sense of peril. She almost regretted her attitude toward her suitors the day before. Why should she have concealed her greater love for Ra-nor, even if the other claimant was Gra, son of Gra? Why had she sent the man she loved to face the perils of the vast forest that her vain wish might be gratified? It had all been so unnecessary.

Again she felt that tightening around her heart—a stifling, suffocating fear that threatened to drive her wild. Night came on, and with the darkness her anxiety for the man she loved increased a thousandfold.

All night she tossed and turned in a futile endeavor to sleep. She wished to set forth into the jungle, that she might in some way protect the daring man who had so fearlessly gone forth to do her bidding. To Gra, son of Gra, she gave but a passing thought. Might the powerful mammoth crush the life from his body, and the lean hyena pick his bones!

In the gray dawn of early morning, Zo-na stole silently from the cave of Dur, her father. Hidden in the folds of her doe-skin garment she bore a keen-edged knife of stone. Though the trail was a day old, the girl picked it up with ease. Alone, undaunted, she sped on, her one thought being to find Ra-nor and beg him to flee with her. What matter if they became outcasts from the people of Gra? Would they not have one another?

She came to the point where the spoor of the great beast, Aa, crossed that of her lover. Once more, that strange premonition of danger. Her heart beat wildly as she bent close over the trail and doubled her speed. Then upon the stillness of the forest came the challenge of Gur and the answering cry of Aa.

Unheard, unseen, the girl came to a point where she could watch the terrific struggle between the enraged beasts. She watched until the body of the shaggy cave bear lay silent at the feet of the giant cat. Then, her terror-widened eyes following every move, she watched her lover as he battled with the great beast, Aa. She barely repressed a cry as the claws of the tiger ripped open his shoulder. She saw the last great conflict, saw the tiger roll lifeless at the feet of her lover, and watched while he set about severing his trophy from the body of Aa. She would watch him, she told herself, until he had finished his task and then she would make her way back as she had come—alone. For soon he would return and lay at her cave the prize she had seen him wrest from the jaws of death itself.

But suddenly her sharp ears caught the sound of a snapping twig. Her keen eyes saw the form of a man through the tangled underbrush, saw his arm raise high above his head, and saw the stone dagger as it poised in mid-air.

As quick as thought, her hand flew to her bosom, where lay her own keen blade. Straight and true as an arrow from a bow she flung it from her with all the strength she could command. The man's form crumpled and fell, and the body of Gra, son of Gra, rolled into the clearing straight to the feet of Ra-nor, his heart pierced with the girl's weapon of stone.

Zo-na turned and, with the speed of a deer, flew over the trail that led back to the cave of Dur, her father, to watch and wait the few short hours until her lover returned, to lay at her feet the head of the great beast, Aa.

NOTE: "Arhl-a of the Caves," another story of prehistoric men by C. M. Eddy, Jr., will appear in the next issue of WEIRD TALES.

The DEATH CLINIC

by Otto E. A. Schmidt

THE obsequious Louis had already taken my hat and coat and pulled out my accustomed chair, before I saw Professor Jacowsky beckoning. He was seated three rows to the right, next to the wall. I was surprized, thinking it could not be I he meant, and looked around to see to whom he was motioning. But he smiled, and I saw his lips frame my name, "Stannard", at the same time that he pointed to the vacant seat opposite him.

Now, on those rare occasions when Professor Jacowsky smiled, it was as if some masculine Galatea should suddenly come to life. Those thin, cold, statuesquely beautiful features instantly broke into a warm, intensely human radiance, like a lily suffused with the ruddy sunset glow.

A great man was Jacowsky. He ruled in lonely state at the very apex of the surgical profession in his particular line, cranial surgery, besides being a renowned alienist and criminologist, and his nod to a struggling young tyro like myself was as potent as the command of Jove.

What would not one of us worshiping smaller fry give to bask in the favor of that great man? To be associated in a case with him stamped the fortunate assistant as a great surgeon, and would be a guarantee of fame and fortune. Small wonder, then, that I obeyed the summons with alacrity, to the evident chagrin of the expectant Louis.

Yet, eager though I was to respond to the call, it was with considerable diffidence that I scanned my host's countenance. A flush of self-reproach mantled my own. I was debating whether or not to apologize for my part in a certain unpleasant incident that had happened some months ago. The professor, however, appeared oblivious of any untoward recollection, as his look and manner expressed only friendliness and even cordiality.

I decided he had forgotten the event entirely, and concluded it was better not to obtrude the reminiscence of any disagreeable memories upon the pleasures of the evening, as his was too big a nature to bear malice. Great men are usually magnanimous.

I still retained a vivid recollection of the affair. It had happened one evening when a crowd of embryo medicos like myself was gathered in the club's card room. We were discussing a celebrated murder case, in which insanity was the defense.

In the exuberance and positiveness of youth and inexperience, I had loudly declared: "Brain storms, bah! It

is my belief that the alienists for the defense are crazier than the defendant, whose insanity they profess to establish," when Professor Jacowsky himself, the dean of all the alienists in the case under discussion, burst through the fringe of the crowd.

His eyes blazed like stars, and his normally marble-like face glowed with saturnine fury as he cried: "Ha, it is such stupid levity and apostasy of puling neophytes like yourselves that is gaining the noble art of Esculapius the scorn of the world!"

He looked around with a malign and baleful glare, as if waiting for some one to take up the gage. But no one handed him his card, or threw a glove in his face—we were in New York, not Moscow—and, with a cold bow, he rapidly left the embarrassed assemblage.

I, the cause of the outbreak, could only congratulate myself that he apparently had not located the perpetrator of that treasonable utterance.

It was common rumor that the professor had not visited the club again since that time. Therefore I was doubly astonished, not only to find him there, but to be singled out as the recipient of his hospitality.

When I had seated myself, he handed me, with exquisite grace and courtesy, the menu he had been scanning, and remarked: "It's an abomination to eat alone, don't you think? Besides" (his professional instinct coming to the surface) "being extremely hard on the digestion, you know."

After enjoying the salad, he said: "Stannard, I have been keeping an eye on you from a distance, and I believe you to have the makings of a good surgeon. You have originality, the daring of independent research, and the courageous initiative of the pioneer."

I was astonished. It was true I had lately successfully handled several difficult cases, one of which had gotten into the "Surgical Monthly," but had no idea my poor triumphs had attracted the notice of such a busy and distinguished practitioner as the professor.

He continued, with considerable pathos: "The unfortunate fact connected with progress due to the labors of great men is that it is so uniquely the result of individualism. Unlike monarchs, there are no crown princes of genius to step into the shoes of great men upon their demise and carry forward their labors. When the king is dead, he is dead.

"This is due, in some instances, to an unworthy jealousy, which brooks no rivals; in some others to a blinding contempt, which can see no possible successor amongst the associates of one's own generation; or, in yet other cases, to the thoughtlessness of a 'splendid isolation' that seeks no successor.

"In my own case, I shall select a young man whom I deem the most worthy, to whom I shall teach all I know of our noble science, whom I shall associate with myself in my work and train to think as I think, work as I work, and continue my labors when and where I must eventually leave off."

I thrilled to the utmost depths of my being at this speech. Could it be possible that I was that fortunate individual he had in mind? Else why then this confidence?

There followed some desultory conversation, during which the professor seemed to be busy with his reflections, and we had finished the roast before his mind once more definitely centered on his immediate surroundings.

"I am informed, Stannard," he said at last, looking at me with his brilliant smile, "that you are an enthusiast in amateur photography."

My heart sank. I feared the professor might consider my penchant a weakness, diverting me from the more serious business of surgery, and was going to berate me and advise its abandonment. I could not lie, however, in the light of his piercing

glance, and nodded affirmatively. I was about to assure him that I was more than willing to give up this recreation, if he thought it interfered with my profession, when his next words spared me this *faux pas*.

"That is well," he said; "it is desirable that men who follow assiduously one line of endeavor should seek relaxation in some lighter diversion. Continuous application to one employment is apt to set up a cerebral congestion, a chronic brain storm, so to speak"—was he mocking me? I could almost believe so—"which the following of a rival pursuit tends to disperse by diverting the accreted blood and diffusing it over another area.

"Up to a short time ago, I gave my undivided attention to my beloved art. But it was a mistake," he added, almost sadly. "I find I have missed many of the good things of life. Now I, too, have become a devotee of the camera."

He lowered his voice, and his eyes shone with almost fanatical enthusiasm as he proceeded: "I have made a wonderful discovery in, or rather, contemplate a new application of photography that will astonish and enrapture the world. I will share with you my secret, but it must remain a secret until I am ready to give it out generally. I have spoken to no other mortal about it, and you must agree to mention it to no one. Will you promise?"

I cheerfully gave my word, almost choking with exultation. My good fortune in being selected as the professor's confidant thrilled and elated me to a point where I could hardly speak.

"Have you an engagement for this evening?" he suddenly asked. Without stopping to think, I answered, "No." As if I would allow any prior engagement to stop me now, at the threshold of my new and glorious career! But hold, there was!

"Then let it be tonight," Jacowsky continued. "Come, let us go to my apartments now, and I will initiate you."

He looked at me solemnly, and spoke slowly, "You must give me your whole time and confidence from this moment and must tell no one of our intentions, or even that you are going with me to my house."

"Er—how long will it take, professor?"

I was surprized at my own temerity in venturing even this timid reflection on his right to my implicit obedience and fealty. In truth, the words burst from me involuntarily.

He looked at me a little suspiciously, I thought, and said, carelessly: "Oh, I won't take more than two, or possibly two hours and a half, of your valuable time."

WE HAD already lighted our cigarettes and were sipping our black coffee when a waiter whispered to my companion that Dr. Brandel, dining at another table, wished to speak with him on his way out. The professor seemed to reflect a moment, glancing over my shoulder in the direction of Dr. Brandel. He nodded, and, turning to me, said earnestly: "Take your time, Stannard, but remember, not a word to any one. Wait for me in the foyer."

I bowed as he rose, leaving me to finish my coffee at my leisure. I did not turn my head to see who had made the request, because I had recognized the name as that of a prominent physician who occasionally called on the professor for his services in difficult operations on rich clients.

At this moment, the prickings of an outraged conscience stung me. The fact was that this particular evening of the week, Saturday, was one of those on which I regularly called on my fiancée. I had not missed these calls for more than a year—ever since I had been courting her—and it had come to be tacitly understood between us that they were reserved for her.

I felt guilty. To omit my call now, after the habit had become so fixed that she had a right to it, and would most certainly expect it, was more than my sense of honor and honesty could stand. And without a word of explanation or postponement! No, that was asking too much. While I could make allowances for the natural secretiveness and enthusiasm that seem to be characteristic of inventors, I resented the professor's suspiciousness and the binding me to a secrecy that seemed unnecessarily restrictive. I would retract my consent to go with him this evening, and postpone the engagement to a time when I was entirely free.

I turned around to locate the professor. He sat at a table, about four or five rows removed, in earnest conversation with Dr. Brandel. I noticed he had so disposed himself that he could observe the table at which I sat. In order to see him, it was necessary for me to lean slightly away from the wall on account of an intervening post; for the wall tables, which seated two, were placed each in little niches, or recesses, formed by the jutting out of the large pillars that helped support the superstructure.

I was about to arise and ask the professor to put off our engagement until a later date, when I was seized with an inspiration.

The grill of the Physicians' and Surgeons' Club is modern and strictly up to the minute. At each table is installed a telephone, as befits the calling of the diners, who must keep continuously in touch with the world and are subject to the demands of duty at every moment. The telephone on our table stood near the wall. Leaning forward, with my face to the left, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, I took down the receiver with my left hand and obtained the old familiar number. I knew that Jacowsky could see little more than my right shoulder, and occasionally my right hand, as I withdrew the cigarette from my lips and flicked off the ashes into the tray. There was hardly any need to lower my voice, even, as it would scarcely carry to Dr. Brandel's table above the usual din of the dining room, quiet though they tried to keep it.

"Helen, dear," I murmured, after the customary salutations, "I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you this evening. I have an engagement with Professor Jacowsky at his rooms tonight, which will permit no postponement. You know how important this should be to me. I have an idea, or hope, that he intends to associate me with him in his work, and, if that is the case, it means that my reputation is established and my fortune made. I will feel, then, that I can afford to marry even a rich young lady like yourself immediately."

She laughed.

"I am so glad, Harry," she cried, bravely trying to suppress the note of disappointment in her tones. "I congratulate you heartily. I think it's just splendid, and no more than you deserve. But can't you come after this wonderful engagement?" she continued. "How long will you be?"

"Oh, until 10, or half past," I replied.

"Good!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "I'll wait up for you. Do run in for a few minutes and tell me all about it. I just can't wait until tomorrow. I couldn't sleep a wink. But remember, you must be here at a quarter of 11, or, at least"—and her voice quavered a little dolefully—"telephone, if you cannot come. Now promise, dear, won't you?"

"I promise," I answered dutifully, not a little charmed by her sweet manner of proprietorship. How ready and willing we are to assume the yoke of obedience when a-wooing!

Just then, I happened to glance around to the right and saw the professor approaching. I turned again to the telephone. "I must bid you good-bye immediately, dear," I said hastily; "I'll explain later."

Hanging up the receiver, I pushed the telephone quickly against the wall.

"Well, Stannard," said Jacowsky, coming up a moment later, "I see you waited for me. If you're ready now, we'll go."

He rubbed his hands gleefully and seemed to glow with some inward satisfaction.

"His talk with Dr. Brandel must have been of a very agreeable or profitable nature," I thought; "the man is actually thawing out."

We left the dining room together, the professor showing me such courtesy and cordiality that I burned with mingled pride and shame. He took my arm like a brother and assisted me into his limousine with the utmost grace and deference. On the journey to his residence, he talked animatedly about his experience in the profession, but not one word of photography or his wonderful invention.

I remember drawing the curtain and looking out into the night. The moon shone with a brilliance that was almost a glare, making the street lights seem pale and wan by comparison. Crowds streamed along the sidewalks, talking, laughing, gesticulating, filled with the glamor of the warm spring evening.

WE SOON arrived at the professor's house, a modest, old-fashioned, two-storied residence, set well back from the sidewalk in a quiet, narrow street, so narrow that even the moonlight did not penetrate. There were no lights, and it seemed from without to be unoccupied. The street was dark and deserted, and the gloomy appearance of the house and its surroundings gave me a chill.

It might have been due to the sudden precipitation from the light and warmth and gayety of the restaurant and thronging streets into the vicinity of this inhospitable-looking neighborhood, with its somber abodes, or the momentary stirring of a rudimentary instinct, grown obsolete by generations of disuse; but certain it was that my exaltation of a moment before suddenly degenerated into a chilling depression.

While walking up the stairs in the silence and semi-darkness, I seemed to lose all consciousness of my surroundings, and moved in a daze or trance. The most distinct recollection I have of my impressions at that time is of walking slowly between two figures in armor, through swaying, shouting, threatening mobs, to a platform from which rose two slender columns joined at the top by a cross-piece. Beneath this cross-piece gleamed a broad and slant-cut knife—the guillotine.

Amidst the hostile throng, however, one face stood out that was not disfigured by hate—the face of Helen. She stood there with arms outstretched, and such an agony of fear, pity, and appeal distorted her features that I stopped short on the steps.

I was about to remember an urgent engagement and beg the professor's indulgence, when the door burst open and I was surrounded by a flood of light. The professor's man took our hats and coats, and I was ushered into what I took to be the study. Bright lights glowed from a massive central electrolier upon a table littered with books and papers. On the hearth crackled a coal-fire, the warmth and cheer of which felt grateful, despite the mellowness of the night outdoors. Of the walls of the room, little was to be seen; for they were almost completely hidden by bookcases filled with volumes of medical lore.

The feeling that had possessed me on the stairway instantly vanished as I entered into the light and warmth. I felt ashamed of my momentary weakness. "Pshaw!" I exclaimed mentally, "it must have been merely the reaction consequent on leaving a good warm dinner, the brilliance and life of the grill and the crowds, and the sudden entrance into this tomb-like street and the sight of this

gloomy house from the outside. Nothing gloomy about its inside, however."

The professor had been busying himself straightening things out a bit, and at length procured a decanter from which he poured two small glasses of brandy. He next produced a box of Russian cigarettes, of a peculiarly pleasant aroma and soothing effect.

He had been talking all the while in a high voice, and with a somewhat nervous manner, apologizing for the disorder of the room and asking what else one could expect from an old bachelor. There was much more in this strain; indeed, I had never suspected the man of such volubility. He seemed to be trying to make me feel at home and show me that he was taking me into his inmost heart and confidence. But not one word of the main object of my visit. Of course, I did not dare to obtrude any reference to his intentions, expressed in the grill, but let him take his own time and way.

He referred to his library with pride, and showed me many rare volumes, counterparts of which not even the library of the Physicians' and Surgeons' Club could boast. He opened cabinets holding hundreds of numbers of various medical journals, each containing articles by himself, or references to his work. He sketched rapidly and concisely some of the more difficult cases referred to therein, and I was astounded at the almost superhuman knowledge and skill demanded and displayed in their treatment.

"Marvelous," I could but mutter, "marvelous."

"Yes," he replied, evidently gratified at my frank and sincere admiration; "sometimes we engage in a desperate duel with death, and, at other times, merely flirt with him. Cases in the latter class I consider simply experiments. When the impulse, which, if continued unchecked, must inevitably lead to dissolution, has been initiated, as is the case in desperate accidents or the encroachments of disease on the vital organs, the surgeon's task becomes a battle royal. Such, for instance, was this case of Benedetti's, where the left ventricle of the heart was penetrated by a stiletto, and this one of Jennings', in which part of the cranium and cerebellum were shot away."

Jacowsky's eyes gleamed as he continued: "The latter operation itself was trivial" (he waved his hand airily), "requiring mere care, haste, and skill, but I truly believe it is, in its entirety and consequences, the most interesting I have ever been engaged in. In fact, I have made the subject my pensioner, with the sole object of keeping him under observation to note the effect of the loss of part of the brain. I have learned many important facts and it has become a sort of hobby.

"One of the factors that has contributed considerably to my success is the inventive faculty, which I possess to a marked degree. I believe I have the most extensive and complete collection of instruments of any individual or association in the world. Many are of my own contrivance. I possess the ability, not only to direct the making of an instrument to exactly meet the requirements of the case in hand, but also I have fashioned many to meet possible future contingencies."

I looked at the man in amazement. All this, though savoring somewhat of boasting, was yet said with a simple satisfaction and complacency, in the manner a man might use in speaking of a task completed merely in the course of the day's work.

There was one curious feature connected with the professor's manner that had forced itself upon my attention through its oft-repeated recurrence. He had the habit, or mannerism, of clasping one wrist with the other hand, and sitting or standing thus in apparent revery. It struck

me as very droll. He looked for all the world like a man feeling his own pulse.

This action was quite frequently repeated in the course of the evening. He indulged it again, after his last remarks, and, as I sat watching him, sprang lightly to his feet.

"Come," he cried cordially; "we will now inspect the glorious work of which I spoke to you at the club. I will show you my treasures."

I FOLLOWED him out of his studio into the hall. As he preceded me up the stairs, I could not help thinking on this human dynamo. Although he was already past middle age, his step was still quick and sure, his bearing keenly alert. Every move of his thin, tall, soldierly frame, his long and slender fingers, attested the possession of a superabundance of nervous power. The high forehead, almost too broad between the temples, the aquiline nose, the firm chin, and, above all, those dominating, unwavering orbs, gleaming in their pale setting, stamped the features of a leader, truculent but real.

He stopped at the end of the upper hall and opened a door. He turned a switch, and I beheld a large room, which occupied the whole of the back end of the upper floor of the building, lighted from above, in the daytime, by two long skylights. He turned on a few more switches, and the blinding glare of the many electric globes was almost overpowering.

"This," cried the professor, waving his hand to designate the whole chamber, "is the most complete, elaborate, and advanced operating room in New York. We are now" (touching a button) "breathing an ever-refreshed supply of sterilized and tempered air."

I looked around, it must be confessed, with something of disappointment. To the casual view, it did not compare with the operating rooms in any of our large modern hospitals. If he had said laboratory and operating room combined, the cases, racks, tables, and shelves covered with instruments and apparatuses, the various tubes, drills, basins and other paraphernalia, might have lent color to such qualification.

He did not give me time, however, to formulate my vague and uncertain —I will not say suspicions, but speculations—into words. Closing the door and stepping to one side, he pointed to a reclining chair, somewhat like a barber's or a dentist's, which stood in the middle of the room, opposite the door.

"There I have an examination chair, which, with a few movements, can be instantly converted into an operating table. Pray be seated," and he motioned to it.

I looked at the chair, adorned with innumerable clamps and hooks and straps that to a layman would appear gruesome, but could only excite the admiration of a practitioner like myself.

"No, thank you," I laughed; "I could not think of being seated while you are standing."

I noted there was no other chair in the room.

"But I beg of you to do so," he insisted. "I cannot talk while seated, and I have much to say."

He seemed to be somewhat irritated at my refusal; so, to humor him, I threw myself into the chair, which felt really luxurious. It had an arm of metal on each side. These, I saw, could be dropped down out of the way.

"Now, perceive," he continued in a mollified tone, "above your head those three boxes, each with an aperture, are kinetographs, so arranged that one takes up the continuation of the work the instant the end of the film in the preceding one has been reached. This is a little invention of my own" (with a touch of pride in his voice) "and gives me a whole hour of continuous exposure. Here," he

resumed, pointing with his toe to a box on the floor, under a table covered with instruments, "is an improved phonograph, also of my own invention, which records continuously for an hour, and is exactly synchronized with the kinetographs. As you have probably noticed, this apartment has unique acoustic properties, with a new microphone attachment, also of my own devising."

"Confound the fellow's smirking, his egotism begins to get on my nerves," I thought.

But he was continuing: "Gives me an exceptionally clear record of every sound, even a whisper, that may occur in any part of this room."

I was somewhat taken back. To tell the truth, I had not noticed the remarkable acoustic properties of which he spoke, though I would have been puzzled to explain in what manner I would expect such to manifest themselves. However, the professor gave me no time to ask questions, but went on: "We have thus a combined apparatus, which will record in sound and scene a clinic that may be exhibited in every university in the world exactly as if the spectators were present at the original."

He now lapsed into silence and again exhibited that peculiar abstraction I had before noticed, wherein he seemed to be feeling his own pulse. This time, it lasted fully half a minute, during which a look of satisfaction, and even pleasure, spread over his face. He dropped his hands with a motion as of finality, as if he had just made a firm resolve. His features sharpened to a tense expression, his eyes took on a steady glitter, and he spoke in short, sharp, businesslike accents, very different from the soothing, purring tones he had till now employed.

"This," thought I, "is the manner of the master at work."

"Now, Stannard," he said, "I have kept you so long in suspense, though trying to entertain you in my poor way, because, as you know, a man cannot do his best work with his stomach full of undigested food. As sufficient time has elapsed, however, for our brain and bodily functions to resume the normal, we will proceed with the main business."

At this remark, my mind awoke for the first time, I must confess, to a realization of the passage of time. There was a clock on a small shelf at one side of the doorway, just opposite the chair wherein I sat. Beside it stood a telephone. I had not noticed either until that moment. The clock indicated half past 10.

It was now a certainty that I could not keep my engagement. I started to rise with the intention of explaining the circumstances to the professor and telephoning my regrets to Helen.

Jacowsky was watching me with an alert, catlike glance. He saw me start and look at the clock, probably reading my intention in my expression. At my first movement, which was no more than a convulsive tensing of the muscles as I gripped the metal arms of my chair, preparatory to rising, he made a quick motion with his hand, and I felt a burning, thrumming, pricking sensation in my hands and arms.

I was powerless to move. In fact, the potent electric current, which I now knew to be coursing through my body, held me tense and rigid, and made me grip the arms of the chair with frightful tenacity. I could not even cry out, nor did the professor give me any opportunity to try. With incredibly swift and silent movements, he inserted a gag (I had noticed it dangling from the head of the chair without knowing what it was) between my jaws and strapped it firmly. My head, neck, shoulders, arms, and legs were also securely clamped, strapped, or tied, until I could not move a muscle. The current was shut off and the professor spoke in terse, tense and authoritative tones.

"Now place yourself in a submissive mood, Stannard," he said.

I perceived the sweet, sickening odor of chloroform.

"You are not the man I took you for," he went on, "if you let our glorious experiment fail for the want of a little courage. Remember the eyes and ears of the world are upon you. Your name will be linked forevermore with that of Jacowsky in an imperishable fame. Posterity will . . . acclaim . . . you . . ."

I dimly saw those glittering eyes glaring into mine with maniacal triumph, while his lips murmured soothingly. I floated and swayed in soft, shimmering clouds, as he receded farther . . . and farther . . .

FROM far, far off, I heard a droning voice. I was back in my college days and realized that I had committed the unpardonable offense of falling asleep at a clinic. A monotonous voice was saying: "And now, gentlemen, you perceive the cortex, clear of the meninges. The dura mater, arachnoid, and pia mater having been . . ."

Suddenly, I recognized the professor's tones, and, like a flash, the recollection of all that had happened came over me. I saw him standing a few steps away, holding a peculiar bowl-shaped object in his hand. He had already noticed my return to consciousness. His manner was eager, triumphant. He pointed to this object and then to the floor, where, directly before me, a large mirror had been stood at an angle. I saw within it the reflection of another mirror, hung high up on the wall.

From the angle at which I sat or reclined, I stared with bulging eyeballs at an image thus doubly reflected therein. My God, it could not be possible! I must be still under the ethereal influence!

I looked again at the object in the professor's hand. He saw my glance and sensed my puzzlement. Pointing to the mirror, to the object he held and then to me, he cried:

"Is it not a superb success, Stannard? Perfect!"

As there is a heaven—and, I trust, a hell for such fiends—the image I saw reflected in the mirrors was a part of my own exposed brain! And the diabolical monster held in his hand the upper hemisphere of my skull!

I fainted.

The next sound I heard on returning to consciousness was an indistinct whirring noise, which soon developed into the ringing of the telephone bell. Jacowsky rushed to the instrument. "Hello," he called impatiently, "hello, hello." My now acutely sharpened senses distinctly heard the strident, tinny vibration of the voice in the receiver, a treble voice.

"Yes," said Jacowsky, apparently in reply to a question, "this is Professor Jacowsky." . . . "No, Doctor Stannard is not here." . . . "He has not been here this evening." . . . . "No, you are mistaken," impatiently.

The truth dawned on me. I looked at the clock. It was ten minutes of 11. The questioner was Helen!

Helen! What was she to me now! To me, a living-dead man, in the merciless hands of a murderous maniac. God! What man had ever been in a like position before? A witness to my own destruction. Living, yet as certainly dead as if mine had been the flesh that once covered the bones of that articulated skeleton hanging in the professor's study.

A recollection of the vision that came to me while climbing the front stairs flashed into my mind. Was it a premonition of the fate that awaited me that her spirit had tried to convey? O Helen! Thou art now lost to me in this life! This life, with its triumphs, its high achievements, its sweetness and hopes, slipping . . . slipping. In the full flush of young, virile manhood, in perfect health, anx-

ious, nay, deliriously aching to live, with everything worth while in life to live for, I was doomed to die, here; in the heart of a civilized city, surrounded by millions who would only too gladly give aid, did they but know my plight.

No, no, no!

I groaned from the uttermost depths of my being. I would have shrieked, cursed, raved.

At the first hollow, impotent sound that issued from my straining jaws, the professor flew to my side and examined the fastenings of the gag. He looked at me reproachfully. How I loathed those false, hypocritical features, how I execrated the insane cunning with which he had lured me into the trap.

In the depths of those dilated, glaring eyes, in that abstracted, impersonal, almost vacant expression, I saw no hope of mercy. The faculty of congruity was entirely fled from that disordered mind.

I saw the situation clearly. Without the check of the sense of responsibility, his paretic brain had taken control of the body, and, though still a perfect running engine, was running wild to destruction—my destruction.

"Stannard," he cried, as soon as he could regain his breath, "I am surprized at you. Will you play the baby now, when our real demonstration is just about to begin? Shame, that you, a man whom I have selected from all the world to share my glory, should betray weakness when success is about to crown our efforts! If you do not already know, I will tell you that it is because I believed you to have an absolutely normal and healthy brain that I chose you, and if you will observe the convolutions and fissures of the cerebrum there in the mirror, you will see that my judgment was justified.

"The study of the comparative anatomy and physiology of the nervous system is one of the most enchanting departments of human knowledge, and the brain is the central station that controls it all. I have made numerous examinations of the brain immediately after death; but the time elapsing between the actual cessation of life and the examination has destroyed the value of the observations.

"The State, through a false squeamishness, is neglecting innumerable golden opportunities to benefit posterity by not permitting competent observers like ourselves to conduct experiments similar to the one in hand upon the persons it puts to death. I once offered, at Auburn, to make the experiment, but they refused me, and drove me out as if I had been a lunatic.

"But now, Stannard," he cried, with glistening eyes, "we shall try the experiment together, you and I."

I shuddered. Of course, I failed to see any humor in his remark.

Pain, I suffered none; and a curious state of indifference seemed to be coming over me. Whether it was that I had reached the limit of emotional endurance, or the dreadful hopelessness and helplessness of my position were benumbing my faculties, I seemed to be losing my fear of death. Perhaps it was sheer physical exhaustion, or I was becoming hypnotized by the strange personality of this madman. I had heard that he possessed and exercised this power. I had reached the ultimate depth of despair.

But his talk and kaleidoscopic moves gave my mind sufficient occupation to keep me from the continuous contemplation of my impending doom. There seemed to be an abundance of method in his madness. I became fascinated with his designs, and even awaited his next action with interest.

He walked to the head of the chair and critically inspected the exposed cerebrum.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "See, the suffusion is already dissipated. Professor Tyndall confessed himself utterly unable to find any logical con-

nection between the molecular activities of the brain substance and the phenomenon of consciousness. He never thought of putting his conclusions to such a test," he added, sneeringly.

He glanced at the clock. It was five minutes past 11. A look of concern came over his features, as he gazed anxiously upward to the kinetographs.

"We must hasten," he continued; "our time is getting limited."

He stalked over to the wall.

"Now, Stannard," he cried, "the supreme moment has come. This switch will connect you with a current of the same strength as that used in public executions. I will at last have an opportunity to watch its effects in action. I am sorry," and he looked at me with apparently genuine sympathy, "that we cannot observe it together. But you have the consolation of knowing that death itself will write your epitaph in imperishable characters, more enduring than decomposing brass or crumbling marble. Posterity, when beholding the flaming story of this hour, will exclaim: 'There died a brave man, a martyr to the cause of humanity!' "

Before I could gasp or moan or faint: "Now," he shouted, and threw the switch.

A blinding flash enveloped me, and I seemed to be hurled to an illimitable distance. . .

I SAW the professor standing before me, rubbing his hands and smiling with intense satisfaction. I vaguely wondered if I was dead.

But he spoke: "Stannard, Stannard, it was beautiful, perfect! But, of course, I did not intend to kill you. The current was only strong enough to cause insensibility. I'm afraid I lied, but I had to let you believe otherwise. We now have an admirable record of 'the connection between the molecular activities of the brain substance and the phenomenon of consciousness.' It was the most intensely enchanting spectacle of my career to see the record imprinted by this simulation of death on the cortex. However, it is all over, and I shall now release you. We will enjoy viewing the records together at some future time."

He began leisurely undoing the fastenings of my legs and hands. These were numb and helpless.

"You will not suffer much discomfort from the operation," he said, gently. "A few weeks of absolute rest in the hospital, with your head in a cast, will put you in as good condition as ever. Barring a bony ridge around the rim of the incision, which your curly hair will effectually hide, there will remain no trace of this adventure. Don't you think it was beautifully done?" he continued, pointing to the severed portion of my skull, now resting on a shelf. "The instrument with which I accomplished it is a vast improvement and adaptation of Hey's saw, contrived by me especially for this occasion."

He had by this time freed my legs and forearms, and was fumbling with the straps that held the gag in place. An overpowering sense of joy, relief, and thankfulness came over me. I felt as if arising from the grave itself. I could only dumbly look my gratitude when I caught his eye, like a dog that has been scolded but is spared an expected beating.

He caught my glance and gazed from me to that gruesome tablet whereon he professed to see my feelings and emotions recorded. I heard him mutter: "Ah, two—despair and unconsciousness, hope and life."

Glancing again at the clock, he frowned, and a singular change came over him. He straightened up, with an evil look flaring in his eyes. An awful fear assailed my heart again.

"Stannard," his voice tolled in cold, measured tones, "the farce is over. Now begins tragedy. Do you remember one night, just four months ago, in the card room of the Physi-

cians' and Surgeons' Club? You insulted me then—you, boor, fool, idiot, bungling amateur and imitator in the sacred science of surgery, dared to criticize me—me, the great Jacowsky! A deadly insult that in my country might be wiped out only with blood. No one has yet insulted Jacowsky but that he has atoned with his blood. I must have blood, your heart's blood."

His voice had risen to a shriek; he laughed—a dreadful, mirthless, hysterical cachinnation.

So this was indeed the end. I saw now that his mind had lost utterly its balance-wheel of habitual restraint and was running riot. He seemed to have shed like a mantle the stern austerity of professional mannerism that had formerly encased him in a frigid repose, and stood revealed in all the brutal animalism of that race whose cruel ferocity has so often shocked the world. His eyes flashed and glanced hither and yon; a spot of crimson glowed in either cheek; his foam-flecked jaws champed like a wolf's, as he strode up and down the room, gesticulating wildly.

I prayed for a quick release from my agony.

He sneered: "You thought you could insult me with impunity, that you had escaped my wrath. Bah, you crude barbarians know nothing of honor, of the amenities that prevail among civilized gentlemen! You settle your differences with brutal blows, like animals, or resort to the cruder and more vulgar protection of the law.

"You thought I did not know you, ha? How quickly and avidly you snapped the bait I dangled before you! You are trapped like a wolf, and I am going to despatch you like a wolf. It was a duel of wits and I triumphed. I was too cunning for you. This is my revenge, Stannard. A sweet, full revenge.

"I could have killed you long ago, but I wanted to use you first. You have furnished me with a subject for experiments I have longed to make. I have records of the effects of fear and hope on the brain, and now death will write his own record. What a glorious revenge! To know that my victim realizes he is dying by my hand while I gloat over him in his death struggles."

He suddenly stopped in his mad walk and slammed a long case, which he took from a closet, on to a table. Opening it, he drew therefrom one of a pair of long, slender rapiers.

"This," he exclaimed, examining it critically, "has already pierced a man's heart. With it, I shall open your jugular."

Resetting the mirror against the base of the door, he cried: "Behold yourself die!"

He placed himself in attitude before me and made a quick lunge.

I do not know whether it was due to a sharp click, as of the door-knob springing back, which I imagined I heard, or to the swift, almost involuntary throwing aside of my lower jaw as far as the straps of the gag would allow; but I could see in the mirror that the thrust had failed, striking to one side, in the muscle of the neck. At the same instant, I heard a crack as the point of the weapon broke against the metal of the headrest.

The maniac stared with bulging eyes.

"What, missed?" he whispered. "And I a master of fence!"

He hurled the useless rapier from him and burst into a volley of oaths in mingled Russian, French, and English.

He dashed about the room, swinging his arms aloft and alternately striking his chest and head.

"My God!" he shrieked. "I must be mad. I must be mad! *Mon Dieu!*"

I closed my eyes to shut out the sight of the horrible monster. He was quiet for a few moments. When

I looked again I saw him pick up the other rapier from the case.

"This time, I shall not fail," he muttered, and raised his arm for the fatal stroke.

A muffled report from without, and the musical tinkle of glass striking the floor, fell simultaneously on my ear. At the same time, the professor's arm dropped limply to his side and the rapier stuck in the floor, quivering.

The door burst open with a crash, and, framed in the opening, amidst blue-coated, helmeted officers, and supported by the emergency-hospital surgeon, appeared Helen. She stood there with arms outstretched, and such an agony of fear, pity, and appeal distorted her features that I straightway fainted. . .

THE story of how she dragged the Captain of Police into her auto and compelled him to accompany her with a platoon of officers is soon told.

They received no response to their ring at the front door and found it locked, the professor having, with insane cunning, dismissed his man for the night.

The officer was dubious about forcing an entrance without a warrant; but, finding a rear pantry-window unlocked, he listened to her entreaties to investigate further.

They found every room open and unoccupied until they tried the door of the one at the end of the hall on the second floor. This being locked, several of the officers sought the way to the roof with the object of trying any window they might discover at the rear. Once on the roof and seeing light streaming from the skylights, they approached, and saved my life at a critical time.

But to me the cruelest blow of the whole desperate affair was the disappointing discovery that the improved kinetographs and phonographs, in which I hoped to find the most marvelous records ever produced by human ingenuity, were only the distorted dreams of the professor's crazed imagination, about which he still raves in a padded cell at Matteawan.

I am glad to add that his prognosis of the case and completeness of my recovery were fully substantiated. . .

How did Helen learn of my desperate plight? True, I forgot to explain that, in the desperate hurry of the professor to stifle my groans at the very time he was denying my presence to her over the telephone, he neglected to replace the receiver on the hook.

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

THE FESTIVAL

An Eldritch Tale of Witchcraft

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Author of "The Rats in the Walls"

ON SALE EVERYWHERE DECEMBER FIRST

Cave of Murdered Men

A Fantasy

By W. BENSON DOOLING

A CHILL, penetrating wind made the place insufferable for any but the dead. Wet, mossy substance clung to the rocky walls, floor and ceiling. Several corked bottles of ancient wines lay on the rock-hewn table. Fungus and spiderlike webbing almost concealed the jade green of the glass. Bats flew about, horribly shrieking and thudding as their insect-ridden wings struck against the mossy cavern walls. A speckled snake hissed a call of warning to a hunger-mad rat. The place was dedicated to, by, and for, the dead. What life existed there was low life, starved life, and pestilent life.

The dead were there. The murdered men were there in a body—men who had been poisoned, men who had been hung, men who had hung themselves, men who had been cut by a saber or pierced by a rapier, men who had dined with Borgia; they were all there, and there they must stay until their murders were avenged.

They sat about the cave in pensive melancholy. Their long, black cloaks hung in tatters about their bony frames. Several of them carried sabers. One had a monocle wedged in his eye-socket. Another held a leafless rose in his hand.

They sat about and talked in whispers that harmonized strangely with the eery whispering of that biting wind. Tales were told—tales of blighted faith, tales of money left in trust, tales of stock markets, tales of roulette wheels, tales of love, and tales of mad orgies. Now and then, as a drinking story was told, a parched tongue touched thirsty lips. Weary eyes wandered to the fungus-covered wine bottles that they could not touch, and back again to the faces of thirsty comrades.

A door in the wall of the cavern—a door of solid onyx, with a knob of lapis lazuli—the door to the world outside, swung open. A figure entered and seated himself at the table. There was an expectant silence. After a moment he raised his head: there was sorrow in his eyes.

"I have been avenged," he said. "I will go now. Another will take my place."

He raised a bottle from the table, broke the neck against the rock with a long, sweeping motion of his bony arm, and drank deeply.

"I drink," he murmured, "to your new comrade."

He faded into nothingness.

A figure arose and gathered his tattered cloak about him. The onyx door swung open. He nodded to his comrades; and was gone.

THE light canoe bobbed up and down with the turbulent waters of the swiftly moving river. A pale, gray-haired man, seated in the stern, guided the frail craft as well as possible in the swiftly moving tide. He glanced over his shoulders, to see if "The Thing" still followed him. It was there, true enough, a few yards behind. He paddled more fiercely. Would he never shake "The Thing"?

It had been with him for the last month. It had trailed him through the streets of a big city. It had followed him, when he sought relief from

"It" and his thoughts, to his country villa. It had stared over his shoulder when he played at cards. It had spoiled his putts on the golf course. It had laughed with him at the musical comedy. It had cried with him at the tragic opera. He did not know what, or who, it was, but he knew that it worried him. It bore a strange, abstract resemblance to the man he had murdered so many years ago. It could not be Radnor! Radnor was dead.

A kingfisher swooped low, and away, with a bright flash of color. An owl gave a melancholy hoot from the thick-foliaged shore. "The Thing" behind him gave a hollow laugh—a laugh that blended strangely with an unseasonable wind.

He raised his hand nervously to his hair. It had been a glossy black three weeks ago. It was a dull gray now. A chill not of the night wind seemed to freeze the marrow in his bones. He laughed a discordant laugh in answer to "The Thing." He glanced back again, and again. His eyes were staring strangely. There was a queer light in them, a light not so much fear as madness.

"The Thing" was gaining on him. There was no doubt of that. Perhaps it would like a drink from the silver flask in his pocket. He would fool it! There was only enough for one. He would make for the shore! That was the thing to do.

The bow of the light canoe turned gently to the right. In a moment it was caught in the churning current. The man in the stern stood bolt upright. The canoe swirled round and round, then sailed out into space, over the falls, in a fifty-foot drop to the angry rocks below. The man saw, just before he dropped, that "The Thing" behind had gone.

THE onyx door swung open, and closed again. A man, in a tattered cloak, walked to the table and seated himself. There was an expectant silence. He took a bottle from the table, broke the neck, and drank deeply.

"I drink," he said, "to your new comrade."

In WEIRD TALES for January

THE OCEAN LEECH

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

Author of "Death-Waters" and "The Desert Lich"

An uncanny sea story about a strange monster of the deep that oozed over the side of a ship and sent a long, white, gelatinous arm down into the cabin. A weirdly imaginative tale.

ON SALE EVERYWHERE DECEMBER FIRST

KAIVALYA

by

Mrs. Edgar Saltus

"THE police have had it for six weeks and they have done nothing."

Sanders emphasized his words with a rap on the table.

"The detectives are up a tree—and why? They follow conventional methods. They argue that Professor Paul Karruck was a man of unusual promise, handsome, wealthy, with everything to live for, and every apparent desire to live. He disappears like a flash of lightning, leaving no trace behind him. There seems to be an utter absence of motive. Love may be counted out. It has been shown that Karruck saw no woman but his brother's wife. His singularly solitary and unblemished life left nothing but his charities to conceal. He did not leave the house on the day he disappeared. He cannot be in hiding. Their theories but leave darkness darker. The facts alone remain. He sent his man on an errand at 4 o'clock, locking, as was his custom, the door of his study behind him. When the man returned at half after 4 the door was still locked. Supposing the professor was engaged in some important experiment, he went away and returned at 5. Still no response. Becoming worried after repeated knocking and calling, he forced the lock with the help of the butler, only to find the room empty.

"The door was the sole exit, and it could be locked but from the inside. Two windows open into the street, but no man could jump three stories without being observed, to say nothing of being killed. A group of children were playing on the sidewalk in front of the house all the afternoon, and they were questioned closely. So were the neighbors opposite. No one had seen him, or had noticed anything peculiar about the house. They arrested the valet and butler, as you know. The former, whose life Karruck had saved, was all but a slave to his master. The utter absence of motive was too apparent to hold him. He is stunned by the loss and cares little what becomes of himself. The butler could easily prove an alibi. He had been under the eyes of the cook and housemaid all day, who, frightened by the valet's cry for help, had accompanied him upstairs where he helped to break in the door. The servants had nothing to gain and everything to lose by the calamity. Let the police attend to them—they know their trade no doubt," Sanders went on, "but we knew the *man*—we were

his nearest friends, and inasmuch as he differed from any one we ever knew, so does this mystery concerning him. We are the men to fathom it if such a thing is possible. We must go at it step by step, and by eliminating the impossible discover at last the possible, from which we must dig the truth."

"You are right, old man, we will."

It was Marix who spoke.

"The whole thing looks spooky to me, but I remember what Karruck once said in reference to such things: 'There is nothing mysterious or miraculous,' he said, 'but all these things are the effects of causes within natural laws. The supernatural of yesterday is the natural of today. When the laws that govern these things are understood, they will appear as simple and commonplace as does now the telephone or the telegraph.' We must, as you say, take the matter in hand. It is a duty to our friend—to ourselves—and I agree with you that we must eliminate all idea of murder and kidnaping and seek for a solution on another and far more difficult plane. We must piece together all the unusual trifles we can remember, no matter how absurd they may seem, and the whole may give us some foundation to build on."

Sanders put his glass down upon the table with a bang.

"I can think of nothing that has much bearing on the case, yet trifles may indicate the importance of some line of action. You remember, of course, the word: KAIVALYA. It stands in raised letters over the door of his study, and I have seen it also in the case of his watch and on the cover of a diary. I spoke to him about it one day. 'What escutcheon is that?' I asked. 'The word is very peculiar. What does it mean?'

"'It is Sanskrit,' Karruck answered after a pause, 'and it means—well, I can hardly explain it in English, but literally it means isolation—supreme attainment. It is of the soul I speak.'"

"'Isolation!' I exclaimed, 'How unnatural! Are you a machine or a man? Have you no human feelings?'

"Karruck smiled. 'You misunderstand me,' he said. 'You do not take the word in the sense I mean. One can only attain supreme isolation when reunited to the lost side of his soul. It is somewhere seeking expression and seeking him, and as the positive cannot exist without the negative, the objective without the subjective, so by the same law must the two which are one potentially reunite, a perfected entity.'

"I was silent for some moments. His words were wild and whimsical to me, and then I saw dimly what he meant. 'Are you speaking of a woman?' I stammered.

"'Yes,' he said, ignoring my surprize. 'The soul is sexless. As men and women we represent the duality of all atomic life, but at best we are only one end of the pole. Every positive must have a negative, and the reverse. It is a law of nature, and sometime, somewhere, we will find the other end of the pole, and then the electricity so generated will make all things possible, even the Kaivalya of which I told you.'

"'Are you speaking of an affinity?' I asked in astonishment. 'Do you believe in such an absurd idea?'

"'I do not believe; I know,' he said shortly and with such emphasis that I let the subject drop. The incident itself is trivial but it shows that Karruck was not the scientific esthete we thought. We have known him some years, but none of us knew him in his youth. Perhaps he may have suffered for a woman—who knows?"

Marix shook his head.

"It's all very poetic," he said, "but Karruck must have spoken in the abstract. He was scientific or nothing. I, too, will tell you of an incident which I have always remembered. We were

sitting in his study one day looking over some old parchments. One of them was especially interesting to Karruck. It alluded, he said, to a fourth dimension for which he had been seeking in vain. 'Have you thought,' he said, 'of that which might be revealed could the fourth dimension be found? Realize for a moment the vast undiscovered realm which exists between the slow vibrations which produce heat, and the rapid vibrations which produce light. Creations unseen and unknown can exist in the infinite interval. Could we discover the fourth dimension, a new universe might stand revealed. The possibilities are limitless. There is no space: by vibration all things are united, to the farthest star of the uttermost universe. Might we not find that vast realm peopled as well by those invisible to mortal eyes and impalpable to mortal touch?'

"Karruck was more enthusiastic than usual. The subject fascinated him, and he spoke of it again and again. We were walking up Cheapside one day when he pointed to an advertisement painted on a sign.

" 'Look there!' he said. I did, and as we drew nearer the letters vanished. 'Look again,' he said. This time I saw the letters re-appear, but the sign read differently.

" 'It is the principle of the thing,' he explained, 'the possibilities it contains. Those signs are painted on narrow strips of wood placed at a certain angle. You can read it—presto, you can't. The sign is still there, but the angle has changed. Again—presto, and you read another sign unnoticed before, though both signs were there all the time.'

"We walked on in silence for some moments. Karruck seemed lost in thought. Then he spoke again. 'Marix,' he said, 'that sign has suggested possibilities of a far-reaching character. Could we discover the fourth dimension, perspective would not exist: in other words we could see all sides of an object at once—see through it as it were, or we would be unable to see it at all. The thing is possible. I am here beside you—I go into the fourth dimension and presto, I am still with you, but you can see me no more. Yet might I not be visible to a universe distinct yet interconnected with our own?'

"I listened and let him talk on. You know how he used to sit here in the club beside us and talk on some subject equally abstract and abstruse. He could theorize, as we all knew, yet Paul Karruck was a man to put his theories to the test. His disappearance is so unusual in its way, that I believe the devil himself could hardly find him."

Marix paused and then I spoke up.

"I CAN," I said, "give you something more tangible to build on," and as I spoke I drew a glove from my pocket.

"It has been in my mind to speak for some time," I continued, "but you will understand better when you hear my story. I live, you know, but a few squares from Karruck's, and although I was in no sense more intimate than you are, I saw more of him because I was always within reach. I dropped in frequently during his experiments and he used to go on as if I was a chair or a table. Occasionally he left word to admit no one, but as a usual thing he was pleased to chat over his work and explain his latest experiments. I was called in, as you know, on the day of his disappearance. I was his nearest friend, and it was quite natural that Andrus should send for me first. I made an examination of the room before any one else was admitted: the servants were too frightened to do more than weep, and you know that I found everything as it had been, and nothing missing. It has been gone over since by Dr. Karruck and his wife, who were absent

on that day, and by detectives and police as well. What I told was true, but I omitted something: I found this glove on the floor. The thing itself is trivial," I continued, "but I put the glove in my pocket and said nothing. As he saw no woman I felt that it must be some souvenir of the past. Why was it there on the floor on that day? I felt at first that I must keep it sacred for his sake, but now I begin to wonder if a woman could possibly have been there. Yet, how did she get in, or how did she go out? The incident is more than peculiar. If you examine the glove carefully you will notice a small 'K' marked with ink on the inside. Does it, too, stand for Kaivalya? It is the only evidence we have, and yet, does it not leave us less to build on?"

Marix held the glove to his nose.

"Have you noticed," he said, "a peculiar perfume about it? It smells like a mixture of amber and chypre. Not a scent a man would use, and it seems fresh. I am certainly no detective, but it appears to me that the glove has recently been worn, and that, too, by a lady who was more than ordinarily excited. The palm of the glove is torn, and the tip of one finger is still slightly inside out as if it had been removed in great haste. Let us find the woman who wore it, and—"

"Just a word," Sanders interrupted as he touched me on the arm. "You told me last week that Dr. Karruck asked you to occupy the house pending some solution, as it could not be left vacant, and his own practise would prevent a change of address. The servants are still there. Why not accept with the proviso that you take us with you? I believe we could work more intelligently on the premises, and Paul himself would have said that the room impregnated with his emanations of thought would in itself be conducive to success. Let us move in tomorrow and work on along our lines. A week hence we can compare facts and theories."

We did as he said, and the following evening we were duly installed in the house—an old-fashioned one in Highbury. Karruck's study was our sanctum and we sat there evening after evening thinking and planning.

AT THE end of the week we began to compare notes.

"I have nothing, absolutely nothing, to build on," Marix began first. "I hardly know whether to speak of it or not—it is so absurd—but I have imagined a very peculiar thing. From time to time I have sat in Karruck's chair—the large one by the desk. In one position my condition seems perfectly normal, but when I move the chair in a parallel line to the desk I have the impression of sitting in a circle of cool air, and at such times your voices seem muffled, and as if they came from a far distance. It is ridiculous of course—an hallucination—but since we agreed to speak of every trifle I mention this."

I looked at Sanders, and he looked at me. Words were unnecessary, and Marix understood.

"Have you both felt it? It's extraordinary," he exclaimed, "and altogether beyond me. I was beginning to fear the thing had turned my brain, but how could it possibly affect us all alike? I tell you frankly I think the whole matter is too deep for us to fathom. Some alchemist or metaphysician might solve it, but it unfits me for business. It is well enough in the abstract, but phenomena of this kind are very unwholesome for everyday diet."

Sanders got up and walked to and fro with his hands in his pockets, and we waited for him to speak.

"I give it up," he said at length. "It is as Marix says—beyond us. We thought we had stumbled upon a clue in the glove, but I have discovered the owner and our theories are

knocked from under us. It was left there, accidentally no doubt, by Mrs. Kasimer Karruck, which explains the 'K' we thought meant Kaivalya. She may not know that she lost it, but I will explain how I know it is hers. I called there on Thursday last. It seemed to me that the doctor better than any one else could throw some light on our darkness. He is a physician, but a scientist as well, and I remember that Karruck regarded his brother as a genius whose discoveries in his peculiar line of work were so unusual, and of such a nature, that he could but imperfectly be understood or appreciated. I found him at home and told him plainly why I had come. I explained our anxiety to probe the matter and find a solution within causes comprehensible to us. The doctor listened attentively.

"'From your standpoint,' he said, 'you are right, but your premises are erroneous. I miss my brother far more than his most intimate friend can dream of. We were necessary to each other. His evenings were usually spent with me or mine with him, as we were both engaged in scientific researches. Our gardens join in the rear, as you know, and we could go through the gate in the fence and avoid the bother of going around the square. He came over on the night preceding his disappearance, and I noted that he was unusually excited. "Kasimer," he said, "you know how I have been searching for the fourth dimension, how it has haunted me from childhood. Today I found it. I will not give my secret even to you until I put its possibilities to practise. Of one thing, however, I am sure. I can go into the fourth dimension and disappear entirely from your sight. I exist, but you cannot see me. What puzzles me is this: can I as readily return to three dimensions and to visible expression?" My theory,' the doctor went on, 'is this. Paul has put his discovery to the test. He has found his way into the fourth dimension and from sight. He is visiting an undiscovered country. Whether he remains from choice or because he is unable to return I cannot say, but this I know: a man who is clever enough to find his way into the fourth dimension will ultimately be able to find his way out. We can but wait. I appreciate your anxiety, but I have no fears. It would be unwise to speak of this openly. We would run a decided risk of being locked up. I, too, have been experimenting in another field, and have met with remarkable success, but of its nature I cannot speak now.'

"He might have said more, but at that moment a woman entered the room. Never have I seen a more beautiful or pathetic face. Her large dark eyes were infinitely sad, but her expression brightened when she saw me. 'My wife,' Doctor Karruck explained, and she held out her hand with a smile. I was dumb for a moment, and then I took her hand in mine. The gloves she wore were identical with the one we have. Unconscious of my confusion, she removed them after a time to pour tea. It was then I had a chance to inspect them while the doctor was busy for a moment at the telephone. I held them to my nose, and my breath came quickly as I recognized the peculiar scent. On the wrist inside they were marked with the letter 'K'. The incident explains itself. She must have forgotten or mislaid it in the studio. It is clear as crystal. I said nothing to the lady. I did not wish to expose myself to ridicule. One thing is certain: we can do nothing. If it is as the doctor explains it, it would take a legion of angels to find him and bring him back. We must yield to superior force or end by going into gibbering idiocy."

"Stop! Didn't you hear a noise? It seemed outside in the hall."

Marix started as he spoke, and Sanders, too, looked rather uncomfortable.

I was about to add, "Hush—listen," when we heard the knob of the door rattle, and then the door itself opened very slowly and we heard a step. There was no one in sight, not even a stray cat. We looked at each other in silence. Our overwrought nerves were susceptible to trifles. I was about to go into the hall to see if some open window had created sufficient draft to open it, when slowly, but none the less surely, it closed as softly as it had opened. The situation was not one for words.

I LOOKED at Sanders and Marix and saw in their faces the reflection of my bewilderment. The silence seemed to harden, and then cracked like a nut with a wild mirthless laugh. I felt my knees tremble and my heart seemed to stop beating. Then the laugh died away, and from out of the emptiness Doctor Kasimer Karruck emerged.

"Did I frighten you or did you think I was Paul returning from the fourth dimension?" he asked. "You didn't seem prepared to give him a warm welcome."

The doctor dropped into a seat and lighted a cigar. Too flabbergasted for speech, we sat down, too.

"It is a joke on you all," the doctor laughed again, and his laughter jarred upon me as a discord. "You refuse to believe in certain natural laws because they are beyond your comprehension, and yet you are all frightened into fits at the simple opening and closing of a door, and are one and all ready to proclaim it supernatural."

It's one thing to know you're a fool, and another to have some one discern it—and I felt far from friendly.

"You must admit it was rather sudden," I stammered at length. Sanders and Marix were as mute as owls.

"It was, yet I must be off as quickly," said the doctor. "But first I will tell you how I came unobserved. I am a physician, as you know, but my specialty is hypnotism. I never give anodynes—I prefer the aid of the former and my success has encouraged me to continue. Years of practise have given me force and control. You heard me turn the knob of the door. I was there as I am now, I was with you in the flesh all the time, but the instant I opened the door and you came within my range of vision, I hypnotized you into the belief that you saw nothing. This is accomplished by three factors: the pineal gland, in which concentration is generated; the optic nerve; and the will, which is fluidic. My positive thought telegraphed the suggestion, and your more negative minds accepted it. *Voila! Me voici!*"

We had gradually regained our balance during the explanation, and we stormed the doctor with questions.

"You are a wizard!" exclaimed Marix wildly. "I never saw anything like it in my life. Do you use this power in every-day life? Could you, for instance, go out for a walk, and make yourself invisible to those about you?"

The doctor threw away his cigar and arose.

"No, indeed," he said. "I might render myself invisible to a few, but the vast majority would see me as I am. It is hypnotism, as I told you before, but I can affect only those within my range of vision, and only then when I can send the suggestion with sufficient force. You were but three, you were nervous, and negative to my direct suggestion."

"It's all very well in the abstract," Sanders ventured to say, "but I'll admit I would not relish it as a steady diet. Does your wife enjoy these manifestations?"

The doctor paused for a moment, and his lips curled in an ugly sneer.

I had thought that he resembled Paul, but in that glance I saw a demon soul.

"My wife is mine," he spoke with unusual emphasis, "and she enjoys my pleasure. My will is her duty, or—"

He paused and put out his hand.

"I must bid you good-night and be off. I am going down to Brighton to assist at an important operation, and came in only to see how you were getting on. Next time I'll knock at the door."

Again I noticed the sneer on his lips. We went down and saw him out of the house, and then we breathed freely.

"I've reached the limit!" exclaimed Sanders. "Out of this place I go this very hour. It's all very well to be practical, but I'll be blessed if I can see everything upside-down and not doubt my own existence."

"Since you feel so shaken up, old man, I think I had better go with you."

Marix tried to conceal the anxiety he felt.

"You are not fit, and I tell you frankly that I didn't like the doctor's manner at all—or the doctor either."

I argued, but they stood firm. Leave they would, even if the house burned to the ground in consequence. I was never considered a coward, but I felt a positive uneasiness at the thought of spending the night there alone. We talked it over as calmly as we could, but half an hour later I saw them both off and told the servants that we would be absent for some days.

THEN I thought of the doctor. He must be informed as well, but I remembered, too, that he had gone out of London that night.

I thought it over again and again. One thing was clear. The doctor, in spite of his apparent desire to have us near him in our investigations, was really most anxious to be rid of us, and had accomplished it most effectually. We were powerless to drag Paul back from the fourth dimension. Nervous prostration and insanity would follow did we not abandon the idea at once. Five minutes later I opened the vestibule door and paused a moment to light my cigar. Some one stumbled up against me in the darkness.

"I want Mr. Haddon at once. Mrs. Karruck wishes to see him."

I recalled the voice of their butler.

"I am Mr. Haddon," I told him, and before I had time to wonder why he had called me we made our way around the corner to the doctor's.

"You may go right up to the library; Madam is expecting you," said the maid who admitted us, and I noticed a glimmer of light at the top of the stairs where a woman stood watching. In a moment I was by her side.

"Hush! This way," she said, and I followed her into a sumptuously furnished study.

Heavy draperies hung from the doors and windows, and the floor was covered with rich oriental rugs, which formed a harmonious background for the massive furniture of carved olive wood. Within the room the woman gained confidence.

"I am Mrs. Karruck, and you—you are Wilber Haddon. I sent for you because you were Paul's friend. You must help me. I am a woman. My fragile hands cannot force the lock, but you can do it for me. You will—you *must*. It is there . . . . *there!* But I will tell you first—I will explain. It happened so long ago. We were children together, Paul and I. He was all, everything to me—a part of my very soul. The future stretched as paradise before us. I could not imagine myself apart from him. I felt that we had been indivisible since the sunrise of creation. He went away for a time, and then Kasimer came. I feared and hated him as one does a snake, but he was not discouraged. He is, as you know, a hyp-

notist, but of such things I knew nothing then, and I became the victim of his spells. Under his influence my hate melted away. Paul's letters were infrequent, and—my God! how did it happen?—he persuaded me to become his wife. Better that I had died! Life became a remittent death. Too late I saw him as he was. Paul returned, but we were separated forever. Kasimer's demon work was accomplished. He had divided our bodies, but he was powerless to separate our souls. The knowledge maddened him, and he forced me to live here within the sound of Paul's voice that he might torture me the more. Freedom is a lost word. I am never free from his influence. When he leaves this house, he leaves me a prisoner. He drags me into this den and hypnotizes me into the belief that I am turned to stone. When his mind is focused upon me he can keep me in that condition for any length of time. This he did tonight, but he must have expended a greater amount of positive force elsewhere after he left me, which detracted proportionately, and as he is unable to focus his powers at two places simultaneously he lost his control over me."

Her explanation was evident. In appearing to us as he had done, he had relinquished his hold over her. Tears streamed down her face and I could see that she was profoundly agitated.

"Let me help you," I said softly. "I was Paul's friend."

"Paul's friend!" she gasped. "God knows he needed one! When I went to him for the last time, he said . . . dear heaven! what am I thinking of? You know my husband, but I have been drilled to fear and obey his shadow. He is a genius, but primarily a scoundrel. You will help me to undo his work."

A despair too great for words transcended the beauty of her face, and her eyes were wild and burning. I thought she might be going mad, but, fearing to increase her excitement, I followed her to a cabinet at the end of the room.

"Here—it is here! Break open the door and I will show you," she cried.

Her emotion communicated itself to me. I did not stop to reason why, but, taking a steel poker from the fireplace, I put it into the lock and twisted. At another time I doubt if I could have more than bruised my hands, but her anxiety gave me unlooked-for strength, and I broke the lock as a boy could crack a nut. In a moment the door swung open, and Mrs. Karruck put in her hand and drew out a bottle of amber-colored liquid.

"At last, my Paul—at last!" she gasped.

A sense of nameless crime crept over me as a chill.

"Look!"

Mrs. Karruck raised the bottle at arm's length, and I gazed at her in fascination.

"You do not know the demon's work, but I will tell you. He has discovered a process whereby he can reduce anything living to a few ounces of liquid in five minutes. Look—this—is—Paul—*Paul!*

"By the hypnotic power which he alone used he went to Paul's room, passed all the servants unseen and there—O God! how can I say it?—he did his demon work and returned as well unseen. 'Look,' he said to me, 'look at your lover! See to what I reduce all those who oppose my will' I have begged him to let me follow Paul—to put an end to my misery—but he will not. If I will not live for him, I must live to suffer."

"Madam," I said slowly, the horror of it gradually permeating me, "what you tell me transcends the limit of human reason, yet I believe you. It is a nameless horror—a thing to make the bravest shudder. Tell

me what I can do for you. Speak as you would to a brother."

"Avenge us. The world will not believe your story. It is too wild, too fantastic; but you must make them know it. I—I shall escape his power. He has divided our bodies for a time—not our souls—our souls are forever one. Promise, promise to avenge us!"

The pathos in her voice was heart-breaking, and she looked me full in the face as might a wounded doe. I gave her the promise she asked for, and my sincerity must have assured her, for she answered quickly, "Then my work is done," and I read a prayer in her eyes.

"Paul! Paul!" she continued, her voice trembling. "At last, my beloved, at last we both escape! My soul is one with you now, and my body soon shall be also. The broken at last shall be mended, and the divided made whole."

Something in her eyes filled me with fear and stiffened my tongue and my arm. Too late I saw her purpose, and before I could move or cry out, she had raised the vial to her lips and swallowed the contents. As one in a dream, I carried her over to the sofa, and felt for the heart that had already ceased to beat.

And then—how can I explain it? My brain seemed to reel, for as I stood looking down upon her beautiful chiseled face, it seemed curiously to change, and Paul—our lost Paul—appeared to look up at me. As one entranced, I continued to gaze and gaze. Sometimes I could see her features and again they were those of Paul. It was not Paul, nor yet the woman, but an absorption, a merging of the two into a perfect whole. The mystery of the horror stunned me, and I covered my face with my hands and groaned aloud. It may have been three minutes (not more), but when I looked again at the sofa it was empty. With a cry I fell down upon it, every nerve in my body trembling, while my hand was almost unconsciously attracted to a tiny spot of sticky yellowish moisture. Then I fainted.

WHEN did this happen? How can I count time here? They tell me that I am crazy, and they laughed at my tale of torture and crime. People always laugh at what they cannot understand. Must I, a sworn avenger, remain in this vile place? Will no one listen? I can at least send out this appeal for help.

THE ELECTRIC CHAIR

By GEORGE WAIGHT

A Physician's Amazing Experiment, and What Came of It

In WEIRD TALES for January

ON SALE DECEMBER 1

A Rendezvous at the Grave

A TRYST WITH DEATH

By EDGAR WHITE

"I DO not know, but somehow I feel if you would venture there some time after the 'turn of the night,' I would know that you were there, and that good would come of it. If there is any way to make my presence known to you I will do it. We may be quite near—you and I—to the Great Revelation. Who knows?"

The man who penned those lines stood closer to the Great Revelation than he perhaps suspected. A few days later Dr. Robert St. Clair contracted a malady from one of his patients and his death swiftly followed, as his constitution had been weakened from over-work. His remains now rested in Oakland cemetery, overlooking the Mississippi. By his request they were brought to the old home town for interment—he wanted to hear the ripple of the great river that had been the playground of our youth. The quotation was from the last letter he had written me.

In some respects Dr. St. Clair was odd. He had never become a convert to spirit communication, but he sought the answer to the riddle as diligently as some men seek gold in the mountains. He wanted to know. From the coal miners he had learned there was a short of inner movement of the earth along about midnight. At that hour rock would fall in the pit and the cross timbers would groan under their weight. It was a period when all the hidden forces of nature were in action. The doctor held the theory that if those on the farther shore could deliver a message, or make their presence known here, it would be along about that period. In his letter he spoke rather wistfully of wishing I would try the experiment with him in case he was called first, and I conjectured that when he learned his malady would end in his death, he stipulated that his remains be brought to our cemetery, where the matter would be convenient, if any place could be "convenient" for a man to go out to a graveyard after midnight and there await the appearance of a shadowy form from the other side.

By nature I'm intensely practical. Being a newspaper man, I'm rather cynical about ghosts, spirit communication, ouija boards and fortune-tellers. But I recalled with a rather queer sensation that the day before I received the telegram announcing the doctor's death I labored under a queer fit of depression. It seemed as if something was going to happen. The doctor had spoken of these things, and cited several startling instances.

I didn't relish that experiment in the graveyard; not that I expected to see or hear anything, but I had the apprehension that one often feels, no matter how case-hardened, that something unusual might happen. The doctor and I had been very close friends until he left to go to the city, since which time we had corresponded occasionally. He never married—too busy, I suppose.

Of course I had to go out there and see the fool business through. I loaded up with cigars and matches and carried a heavy walking-stick. The stick was for dogs and tramps. It would be useless against the sort of "people" I might be going to meet, I knew.

Oakland is a lovely cemetery. It is on a rolling bluegrass hill running right up to the bluffs of the great river. There are many beautiful trees. I've known of men who died thousands of miles away and asked that they be buried in our cemetery because of its singular picturesqueness and solemnity.

It was a pretty, moonlight night, and I chose to walk rather than hire a car. I knew all about the place—in day time. You rarely see people who have business in a graveyard at night. The trees were grotesquely large and the thick foliage shut out the rays of the moon. It was intensely dark, but I had a flashlight and could follow the driveway. At times there would be queer rustlings among the grass and leaves. Occasionally there was the strange cry of a night bird, and the distant bay of a hound.

"Sacred to the memory of—"

I knew how all those headstones read, terminal marks for life's journey. On the very old ones were indexes pointing upward, always upward. God grant "they" traveled that way.

"If there is a way—"

I shuddered. In a moment I would know. The vault was on a sort of cleared space, not far from the edge of the tall bluff, the foot of which was lashed by the tide.

"HELLO!" I cried.

A woman was standing at the front of the vault, moving her arms dramatically. She wheeled on me, and I was startled by the unearthly beauty of her pallid face. Cold shivers ran down my spine. I might as well set it down right here that I believed I had met a being from the other world—the time, the place, the dark dress, with the hood thrown back revealing a face of rare loveliness, but pale as death—what could it mean? But she broke the spell:

"Who are you?"

Her voice quivered with emotion. She had been weeping.

"A good friend of Dr. St. Clair's," I replied, and my voice showed the agitation I felt. "Did you know him?"

It was evident my presence had not scared her, and that was why I still regarded her with doubt.

"Yes. He saved me from hunger—then killed my soul!"

I cannot convey the intensity of the words. As she stood there, her hands clenched, with deep furrows in her forehead, I wondered whether she was human or something sent up by the fiend to curse the dead. Certainly none with a right heart could feel bitter toward a man like Dr. St. Clair.

"You are a friend of his—then listen," she went on passionately. "He never wronged me in the usual way—not that. But he was always kind and gentle and good whenever he came about me; he would lay his hand on my shoulder and call me 'his good little girl.' I was a nurse, and he let me love him—love! Why, I would have died for him, and he knew it! He knew it as well as if I had told him. But I was no more to him than the boards he walked on!"

"Go on," I said, sitting down on a bench near the vault.

"He died suddenly and I never got to tell him," she said. "But I knew he had an odd fancy that the dead might come back over their graves and communicate with the living. His idea was they awakened after midnight. And I came all the way to

tell him what I thought of him—I—I love him so!"

She stamped her feet. Then she broke down crying and flung herself on the bench beside me. She looked intensely young and childish, and it was hard to keep away from the idea that she wasn't a woodland fairy, crushed and bruised, out there in the moonlight.

"Listen, little friend," I said, "I have known the man you speak of much longer than you have. You have simply mistaken him. I'd stake my life on his honor toward women. If he let you love him he loved you. You can set that down."

She stopped crying and straightened up, moving a little closer toward me.

"I am here tonight at his request, as conveyed in the last letter he wrote me", I went on. "I have that letter with me. What is your name?" I asked abruptly.

"Agnes Lindell," she whispered.

"That's the name," I told her, "and you can see it in a few moments yourself. Now listen here," and I held the flashlight to the paper: " 'In our hospital is a young lady named Agnes Lindell, one of the sweetest and most faithful girls I have ever seen. I can imagine your ironical smile at this, coming from a hard-boiled woman-hater like myself. To no other person would I make the statement, and you know me too well to attribute it to boastfulness, but this dear little girl is so grateful to me for a fancied service that she thinks I'm the greatest fellow in the world. If I wasn't sure her feeling is founded altogether on gratitude, I'd ask her to marry me, despite my being many years older, but I can't get away from the conviction that it would be wrong to take advantage of my influence over her. I love her too much for that. God knows I want to do what's right, and should anything ever happen to me, Jim, and you could find her, I wish you'd tell her that with my last breath my thoughts were of her."

The girl reached gently over and took the letter from my hand.

"It's mine by rights," she murmured.

I nodded. "It's yours."

She fixed it in her bosom some way, taking extraordinary pains, it seemed to me, to secure it with pins. Then she smiled and impulsively held out her hand.

"I'm so glad I met you," she said in a deep, melodious voice which seemed to be hers by birthright.

Her face was serene and happy.

"It was rather lucky," I remarked, "but it's getting chilly out here—hadn't we better be going back?"

We were standing close together, she hanging to my arm as we strolled slowly along.

"Do you believe the people up there understand the truth of all these things that worry us so down here?" she asked, looking eagerly into my eyes.

"Most assuredly," I replied. "There is no doubting up there, no grief, no sorrow at separation."

WE WERE following the path close to the edge of the bluff. An icy chill, like the breath of death, came up from the dark waters below. Suddenly to the northeast a long, slender, pink streak of light appeared over the trees on the far side of the river.

"Look!" she cried, letting go of my arm. "The dawn is breaking . . . . It's all light over there . . . . he's calling . . . . calling to me . . . . I see him . . . . Doctor!—Robert! . . . . I'm coming!"

And before I could reach her she ran to the edge of the high bluff and leaped off like a bird!

THE VALLEY of TEEHEEMEN

A TWO-PART NOVEL

by Arthur Thatcher.

HERMAN VAN OTTER had completed his day's training preparatory for the heavyweight championship battle, and as was his custom, had stopped at the laboratory where his old friend and former fellow collegian Bruce Benton spent much of his time.

"I have an invitation for the two of us," Otter announced as he entered Benton's place. "Our mutual friend, Captain Holton of the air service, is taking the daughter of Admiral Hart to visit her father, commanding the Atlantic fleet, now executing a series of war maneuvers somewhere in Cuban waters. He has asked us to accompany him. The seaplane which Holton operates is one of the new type equipped with the great Hurtson motors, the super-engine that Uncle Sam has used to replace the Liberty motors in his fighting aircraft. The plane has a cruising radius of three thousand miles. We will make the round trip to the fleet in less than a day. What shall I telephone him as to your answer?"

Benton turned from the sink where he had been cleansing a set of test tubes and addressed Otter: "I'll make the trip provided weather conditions are favorable. I'm not a swimmer, and I don't fancy trying to swim the distance between here and Havana in case of an accident to the plane."

"Enough said," responded Otter. "We must be at the flying field at 7 sharp in the morning, as Holton desires to get an early start."

"I'll be there," Benton assured him. He washed his hands and sat down opposite Otter. "How's the training for the big scrap coming, Herman?"

Otter shrugged his massive shoulders and smiled.

"Getting better every day, Benton," he replied. "I'm not making any rash statements. I'm letting the other fellow do all the talking. If the information I get regarding his condition is reliable, a few rounds ought to see me the next heavyweight champion of the world. When I have accomplished that and fought another battle for the title, I shall quit the game. The money I will get out of these two fights will be more than enough to keep me the remainder of my life. That accomplished, I intend to cater to my private hobby, the study of medicine, and get my degree. The only appeal the fight game holds for me is a mercenary one. Win or lose, the coming event will net me a cool one hundred thousand dollars."

"Not so bad," said Benton. "You see that bunch of containers there?"

Otter nodded understandingly.

"They bear bombs, and there is enough of my new explosive to blow this town off the map. I am to demonstrate their effectiveness to the navy department in two weeks. They are designed for the air defense craft of the coast guard. I intend to take half a dozen of them with us on the trip tomorrow to make a few tests off shore on the return trip if any suitable targets are in evidence. If the tests prove successful (and I feel confident that they will), then I, too, may expect to net a sum sufficient to keep the wolf from the door until I have lived my allotted time."

The two remained in conversation for another half hour, at the expiration of which time Otter left the laboratory and Benton went to his boarding place.

2

THE June sun rose early the following day, for the summer solstice was little more than a week away. Captain Holton had arrived at the flying field an hour before the other two men of the party and had the big battle plane in readiness for the start. Otter and Benton arrived about the same time. The latter carried a small leather case in which he had packed a half dozen of the new bombs.

Otter informed Holton of the explosives carried by Benton, and the officer immediately showed great interest when he learned that the bombs were to be given a trial by the navy department.

Shortly after 7 o'clock Virginia Hart arrived. The three glanced at the girl as she stepped quickly from the automobile that had conveyed her to the flying field. Benton noted her trim figure as she approached the group.

"I must apologize for being late," she said, "but I had a lot of last-minute details to look after before I could get away."

"A few minutes' delay will not amount to much," replied Captain Holton. "The plane will make the trip in a jiffy anyhow. The longitude and latitude of the fleet were wirelessed to the station a half hour ago. They are little more than three hundred miles away. Into the plane, all of you, and we'll hop off."

The chauffeur removed two large suit cases from the automobile and handed them to Otter and Benton.

"My wardrobe for the trip," smiled Virginia. "I expect to spend several weeks with my father and the fleet."

The four climbed into the big battle plane. The motors started, and soon the plane soared aloft and headed toward the open sea.

An hour after the start the attention of Benton had been directed toward the south, where a great bank of gray clouds was visible.

"It won't be many days before we get some inclement weather," he remarked to Otter, who was seated by his side.

"I would say that it's not going to be many hours," replied Otter, "but I'm not a judge of storms over the ocean. It may be only a thunder squall passing along."

Another half hour passed, and at the expiration of that time Captain Holton began to make observations of the approaching storm.

"I'm going to seek a higher altitude," he remarked, as a strong gale began blowing from the south.

Virginia Hart listened to the conversation that passed between the men. "I fear that I made a mistake in selecting this day," she said uneasily.

"It is probably a small hurricane," said Holton. "There is no cause for anxiety, as I have driven this plane through several of them. It is possi-

ble that the extent of the storm is narrow. By taking a higher altitude, we shall probably encounter less powerful air currents and soon pass through the storm."

The plane rose higher and, as its elevation increased, the storm burst around the passengers. The wind buffeted the plane, shaking it in every part. The forward part of the plane, where the compass and the delicate instruments for determining elevation were situated, was wrested from the main body of the ship, and Captain Holton was left to steer his course by guess. The squall that tore away the instrument case from the hull nearly overturned the plane, and the big aircraft started to drop into the thicker storm raging beneath it. A moment the motors faltered, then resumed with terrific velocity their contention with the storm.

Virginia Hart, her face pale, turned to Benton and grasped his arm.

"Do you think there is any possible chance of returning to the coast?" she questioned.

Benton glanced into the large brown eyes turned toward his own and realized the panic of fear that was tugging at the heart of the girl.

"Captain Holton will pilot us to safety," he assured her. "We must fight the storm until it subsides; then we can steer a course toward the fleet or to the coast, as you may desire."

"If my father has encountered this storm, he will be greatly worried," she continued. "He expected me before noon today, and it is now past that time."

After another hour spent in the upper cloud strata of the storm, Otter left his seat near Benton and made his way to a place nearer the pilot.

"This looks like a tropical hurricane of enormous proportions," called Holton. "It may take hours to pass. We must be several hundred miles off of our course already."

Otter nodded in silence as he riveted his eyes upon the great bank of fog and driving mist.

"How long can you remain aloft?" he questioned.

"Ordinarily a sustained flight of thirty hours. I have been using a tremendous amount of fuel in battling the storm. We should remain in the air at least twenty hours."

"Then what?"

Holton shrugged his shoulders.

"If we cannot make a landing on the earth, then we must glide to the waves."

The gloom that pervaded the upper strata of the storm began to lighten, and Otter called Holton's attention to the fact.

"I believe we are about through the worst of the hurricane," the pilot remarked.

Another ten minutes of riding above the tempest brought an increase again in the darkness. The terrifying spectacle of two black, funnel-shaped clouds riding higher than the tempest beneath approached the traveling airship at the speed of an express train. The base of the funnels extended into the lower strata of the rolling storm beneath, and the whirling clouds were twisting now higher into the upper air and then falling again to the denser mists beneath. The two clouds were a quarter of a mile apart.

"A regular Kansas twister or team of twisters," shouted Holton, steering the plane so as to pass between the tails of the funnel-shaped clouds. As the plane approached a line between the two passing demons of the Caribbean, riding so high above their allotted environment, a terrific electrical disturbance became noticeable. Blinding flashes of lightning marked the pathway of the fleeting ship of the air through the darkness accompanying the approach of the twisters. The metal formation of the plane appeared livid with electrical sparks as the ship

encountered a greatly increased wind resistance.

"I have often heard of twisters going into the air out west," said Otter, "and wondered where they went. I can hardly believe my eyes."

The new danger was passed, and for another three hours the plane battled on. Darkness gathered rapidly. Holton at the steering wheel was beginning to feel the terrific strain of driving and consented to allow Otter to aid him in guiding the craft through the cloud banks.

HOUR after hour the plane fought its way through the darkness. The loud roaring of the wind and battling of the motor made speech almost indistinguishable. Suddenly the engine ceased working.

"What's the trouble?" Otter questioned anxiously.

"We are out of gas and are falling," remarked Captain Holton.

Virginia Benton heard the announcement and grasped Benton's arm tightly.

"We are falling," she said, and Benton could not but admire her calmness. "The waves will soon beat our vessel to pieces, and then will come the end of us all."

"There is no certainty that we are not now flying over land," Benton encouraged her. "We have covered many hundred miles through this storm. I think Holton steered as nearly as possible toward the coast. We have been in the air about twenty-four hours and must have covered about a hundred miles an hour. But he did not dare attempt to descend through the terrific storm."

Captain Holton at the steering wheel set the plane into a glide, and slowly the huge ship of the air volplaned toward the earth. Gradually it descended, battling the strong gale, which during the past hour had begun to show signs of abating.

Otter, his face stoical, remained motionless at Holton's side.

There was a sudden crash. The four occupants were hurled forward from their seats, and the great plane shivered in every part. Then it settled down for a few feet, and remained motionless.

"We have alighted in the top of a forest," Holton announced, regaining his seat. Otter nodded, while Virginia Hart and Benton regained their former positions and peered over the sides of the plane in an effort to pierce the intense darkness beneath.

"We have escaped a watery grave by the merest chance," Holton continued. "I have steered my course for the past twelve hours only by guess, since the wind shattered and tore away the portion of the plane where the instruments were situated."

"We shall have to remain in the plane until morning," said Benton, "and then we can determine just where we are in the world."

The wind began abating, and with its lulling the rain ceased. The clouds divided in the heavens, and stars shone at times through the rapidly moving squadrons of fleecy clouds.

"There are a number of blankets in the end locker on the right side," Holton informed. "We may as well get some of them out and rest as comfortably as possible until morning. There are some wines and packages of assorted cakes and crackers in the same receptacle."

Benton opened the locker indicated by Captain Holton and drew a number of blankets from the place. He passed two of them to Otter and Holton. An extra one was drawn out for Virginia Hart. The members of the party removed the slickers that had shielded their clothing during their nerve-shaking ride through the tempest.

"I do not care to eat," Virginia replied in answer to Benton's query re-

garding her desires. "I want to gain a little rest if possible."

Benton spread a heavy blanket on the floor at one side of the plane for the girl. In imitation of Otter and Holton, Benton wrapped himself in a blanket and lay down in the bottom of the plane. The four passed in a short time into a deep slumber.

An hour had elapsed when Benton was awakened by a terrific noise somewhere in the forest below. The bellow reverberated through the forest fastnesses. In the distance an answering cry sounded.

Benton rose to a sitting position and noted that day was beginning to break in the eastern sky.

Again the strange roar was repeated, and in a few seconds the answer came sounding back through the forest below.

Otter and Holton awoke at the second calling of the utterers of the unusual noises. Virginia Hart remained sleeping, her hair falling about her shoulders as she had loosened it before lying down. A few stray tresses curled about her forehead, and Benton noted for a moment the long eyelashes with their graceful curves and the well-formed eyebrows as she slept.

He moved toward Otter and Benton, and the three conversed in whispers.

"What do you make of our position?" Holton queried as Benton approached the two.

"Judging from the racket I recently heard," responded Benton, "we must be in a tropical jungle."

Otter nodded.

"I have heard the roars of many kinds of wild beasts in my time," he said, "but I never heard anything with a pair of lungs to equal the two birds that just sang for us."

3

THE calls of multitudes of birds began sounding from the forest about, and with their notes was mingled the chatter of monkeys, which had discovered the plane and its passengers in the early morning light.

Virginia Hart awoke and sat up, her brown hair falling in ringlets about her shapely shoulders.

"Where are we?" she asked, gazing about at the tops of the tropical trees among which the plane was lodged.

The three turned toward her as Benton answered her inquiry.

"We do not know, Miss Hart," he replied. "We are somewhere in a tropical country, probably South America, but just where remains a problem. We intend to make an effort to leave our present position as soon as we are sufficiently rested, and find a settlement where we can obtain information that will enable us to get in touch with the world again."

Captain Holton pointed to the tall mountains in the distance.

"We are apparently in the center of a circular valley surrounded on all sides by seemingly insurmountable mountains," he said. "If you will look you will observe, as I have done, that the mountains form a perfect circle. The diameter of the valley which they surround must be at least fifty miles, and possibly more."

The wild roar that had first awakened Benton sounded again, and Virginia Hart turned toward the former with a look of wonderment on her features.

"One of our unknown neighbors," Benton explained. "It has a voice quite terrible in itself, but the possessor may be only a harmless animal."

"The best plan is for us to eat first," Captain Holton suggested, "and then begin finding our way to some place where we may ascertain our location. There are enough provisions stored in the lockers of our plane to last several weeks. There are two dozen good rifles and a number of revolvers in one of the lockers,

with a sufficient supply of ammunition to run for some time. Then we have Benton's bombs, which he brought with him for experimental purposes."

Holton opened one of the lockers and brought forth an assortment of canned goods with a bottle of wine. Virginia Hart at once insisted upon assuming the responsibility of preparing the repast. With Benton's assistance, she soon had a tempting lunch spread out on one of the locker doors.

"Just a minute," called Otter; "I think I have made a discovery."

The powerful German began making his way from the plane into the branches of an adjoining tree. With wonderful agility he worked along the branches until the other members of the party discovered also what had first attracted his attention.

The branches of a second tree were extending into the gigantic limbs of the one upon which the bulk of the plane reposed, and several large bunches of fruit were hanging downward from the limbs.

"Bananas for breakfast," called Otter, as he approached one of the bunches of the fruit mentioned, toward which he was making his way. Holding to the limb he began throwing the fruit toward the other men in the plane. When a sufficient supply had been gathered, Otter again made his way back to the plane.

"Wonderful in flavor," Virginia Hart commented, as she tasted of the fruit that Otter had gathered.

The other members of the party agreed with her that never before had a breakfast tasted so good.

When the meal had been completed a general discussion of the method of procedure to be followed was entered into.

"We must take enough food to last for several days," said Holton.

Suiting the action to his words, he began drawing packages of canned goods from the lockers and making them into three packs.

"Each man shall carry a pack," he announced. "Benton, you and Otter may take your choice of the rifles. There are plenty of revolvers for all of the party."

"You must allow me a weapon, too, Captain Holton," Virginia insisted. "I have always been a lover of outdoors, and I pride myself on my ability as a marksman on the range."

"I'm glad to learn that, Miss Hart," Holton replied. "We always carry a rope ladder in our planes, and this is one time when it will come in handy for making our descent to the ground."

Benton and Otter each selected a weapon, and Virginia, too, took a rifle of heavy caliber, yet light enough to be easily handled.

Captain Holton selected his weapons last. To each man he handed a thirty-eight police positive, and a thirty-two automatic was passed to Virginia.

Each man took up one of the packs, and the descent to the ground began.

4

HOLTON was the first of the party to reach the earth. Otter came down next and Benton followed.

Virginia Hart, before descending, changed from the costume she had been wearing and donned a suit of knickers, which she had carried in one of her suit cases. When she had completed the change, she followed after the men, climbing down the ladder as nimbly as if the experience had been a part of her daily routine for years.

Captain Holton took the lead. Otter was second, and Benton assisted Virginia along the more difficult places through which their course led.

"It's going to be rough traveling," Holton commented as the four paused for a time to rest. "From my observation, we will want to select a safe

place to spend the coming night. There are no doubt numerous large beasts to be encountered. During the day, they will remain largely under cover, and we have not so much to fear unless we should encounter them by chance."

"What possibility do you think we have of reaching some settlement?" Otter queried.

"I hardly know what reply to make," Holton returned. "We are in some tropical country, possibly some part of South America. If we are in an unexplored region, it may be weeks before we can expect to get into communication with the outside world again."

"We are fortunate in having a plentiful supply of ammunition," said Benton. "Eventually we shall get some place if we keep traveling."

"I have been recalling all my past study of physiography," Holton continued. "To the best of my recollection I never have encountered any description of a circular valley surrounded and walled in by gigantic mountain peaks."

"I gain the impression from what I have observed," said Benton, "that we are in the heart of a gigantic crater, perhaps one hundred miles across. Sooner or later we are going to be compelled to scale the distant peaks unless we can find some defile or passage to the outside world."

The journey through the jungle was again resumed. Captain Holton, who was a short distance in advance of the others, suddenly halted and gave an exclamation of amazement.

"What's up?" Otter questioned.

Holton pointed before him into the jungle.

"Looks like a jungle road," Otter commented, as the four stood and gazed as far as they could along what appeared to be a frequently traveled broad pathway through the undergrowth.

"A trail of some kind," Holton admitted. "But did you ever see such animal tracks in your life?"

Benton and Holton were studying the mucky ground.

"The tracks have something of the appearance of those of an elephant, though much larger, and different in formation," he commented.

"The path will offer a much easier way of getting through the jungle," Otter suggested. "Of course there's the danger of meeting the beast that swings such a wicked hoof."

"Possibly it will be safe to travel this road in the day time," said Holton. "The tracks appear to be several days old. What do you say? Shall we travel this trail and take our chances, or shall we continue as we have?"

Virginia Hart, who had been quietly studying the strange tracks and listening to the conversation of the men, then spoke.

"I am ready to follow this trail," she said. "Somehow I feel that it will lead us to some human habitation. The tracks may be of some strange beast of burden known only to the unknown inhabitants of this valley, shut away from the remainder of the world by a barrier of impassable mountains."

"I have three of the bombs in my kit," Benton remarked. "If we encounter anything very difficult to combat, it will afford a good opportunity for testing the effectiveness of them."

THEY followed the trail for several miles through the dense growth to a point where the trees began to grow thinner over the surface of the ground. Presently the party emerged from the forest and stood on the border of a plain that stretched away to the foothills of the distant mountains. Here and there small clumps of timber dotted the otherwise treeless expanse.

The ground before them for several miles presented the appearance of a small desert. The soil was mostly sand and there was scant evidence of vegetation.

"What are those things in the distance?" Otter asked, as he pointed to where a number of white objects gleamed under the scorching rays of the sun.

"They resemble bones," replied Benton.

"I see them," continued Otter, "but there are a number of other objects and they appear to move."

"Let's investigate," suggested Benton.

The two left the border of the forest and walked toward the objects indicated by Otter.

"Human bones," commented Benton as they observed several bones in their course.

"Yes, and the other objects are human beings!" Otter exclaimed. "And they are bound together in pairs!"

The terrific roar that had sounded in the jungle in the vicinity of the landing place of the plane during the early morning hours again pealed forth. From the border of the forest, several hundred yards from where the party had first halted and discovered the piles of bones in the distance, a creature of tremendous size rushed forth.

Its height was greater than that of the largest elephant. Its neck extended some ten feet, and the enormous head had the contour of a serpent. As the beast bellowed, its open mouth exposed rows of great teeth in crocodile formation.

With the rush of the animal into the open, Otter and Benton brought their rifles to their shoulders. The beings fastened together cried out with terror: "Teeheemen, teeheemen!"

Otter fired first and Benton second. Both aimed at the head of the beast. The bullets struck the mark but produced little effect upon the charging creature.

"He's a bone-head right!" Otter exclaimed hurriedly. "Pump it into his body!"

The two lowered their aim and fired a half dozen shots each into the charging animal. The change in the aim was fortunate, for the beast fell with a hideous roar. It struggled to its feet, but again went down before another volley of shots.

Drawing his knife, Otter went to where two olive-colored men were tied together and cut the leather thongs that bound their wrists and arms. Benton walked to the other pair, and discovered that one of the two was a young woman probably less than twenty years old. The girl was not so dark as the men, and her limbs were well rounded and her body gracefully formed.

When the four had been released they fell at the feet of Otter and Benton. They muttered a lot of jargon which was complimentary to the two. The one word they caught was "teeheemen." That was the same word that the natives had cried out when the strange beast first charged toward Otter and Benton.

Captain Holton and Virginia Hart arrived at the side of Benton and Otter as the natives began bowing before the two.

"They think you are gods," said Holton. "From the appearance of this locality, these four must have been placed here to furnish a square meal for this creature that you have just shot. The piles of human bones indicate that such must be the practise. Possibly these people are criminals offered here to the strange beast as a punishment for their crimes. Or they may be prisoners of some other tribe and have been placed here as a sacrifice to the animal."

Virginia Hart went to the young woman bowing on the ground, and raised her to her feet. The girl

looked at Virginia with awe. Virginia smiled and indicated that the girl should tell the men to get up. The girl smiled back and spoke. The three men rose from the ground.

"I wish these devils could talk so we might understand them," said Otter. "Then we could find out where in the world we are."

Captain Holton pointed out across the plain and asked the men where they lived. They only smiled and shook their heads.

"It will be best to return to the forest and find a safe place to spend the night," he said. "We'll have to learn the language of these people, and then we can probably get information that will be of value to us."

Holton led the way toward the forest. The four additions to the party followed behind, talking excitedly among themselves. Occasionally they pointed to the rifles that the white people were carrying.

The party penetrated the forest for a short distance. Beneath an enormous tree Captain Holton paused.

"We will spend the coming night here," he stated.

The natives looked at Holton, then, with exclamations of understanding, they began to climb the tree. Like monkeys they made their way to the ends of limbs. They broke off branches and began building a platform high above the ground. Two of them descended and went into the adjoining forest. Later they returned with two strands of grapevine and began to fashion a rude ladder. Captain Holton loosened his hand ax from his belt and assisted in chopping poles and material to construct the platform in the tree.

"By golly, we're getting to be a bunch of birds," commented Otter, looking critically upward at the platform. "It's a regular cuckoo nest we're erecting. What with shooting animals that are not in any natural history and jumping from a city to a jungle through a cyclone, I'm beginning to think that I *am* cuckoo."

"Tomorrow we will make a sketch and close examination of the beast that you and Benton brought down," said Holton. "We must be in a valley never before penetrated by civilized man. The creature belongs to an age long past, and is supposed to be extinct. I want to remain in this locality for a few days until our new associates can be better understood."

WHEN the building of the platform had been completed, Holton suggested that the party get supper. Benton and Otter began gathering sticks and piling them in preparation for lighting a fire. The natives, including the girl, followed the example of the white men, and soon a sufficient supply had been gathered to burn during the night.

Holton decided to begin the task of learning the language of the natives. He stepped before the largest of the natives, whose orders the other three had obeyed from time to time. Pointing to himself, Captain Holton repeated his name. Pointing to the other members of the party Holton called each by name.

An expression of understanding lighted the countenance of the big fellow. Grinning at Holton, the big native pointed to himself.

"Gomo," he said.

Pointing to the native girl he said, "Gala." To the oldest man, who was somewhat smaller than the other, he applied the name of Eppa, and to the youngest man of the party he announced the name of Mara.

Pointing to the sticks that had been gathered Holton called the word "fire." Gomo nodded understandingly and went in search of a suitable stick. Coming back he pressed a straight stick into a small depression in a second larger one. The young man Mara stepped forward and

wrapped a leather thong about the longer stick which Gomo held. Mara began whirling the stick back and forth, the friction making the sticks grow hot.

"I'll show them something," Otter announced, springing forward. "Cut that out," he called to the two natives. "I'll show you how to build a fire."

Otter took a couple of matches from his pocket. Gathering a handful of dry grass he struck the match and set the grass afire. Adding small twigs he soon had a fire started, while the four natives looked on with eyes opened wide with amazement. They again engaged in excited talk and gazed at Otter with mingled admiration and fear.

"You believe in making yourself solid, Otter," laughed Captain Holton. "They think you're a real fire god now."

Some tins of canned goods were drawn from the supply carried by the party. Benton and Virginia began opening them and preparing a meal for the party. Gomo and Mara entered the adjoining forest and soon returned with an abundant supply of fruit.

5

WHEN the supper had terminated, the four members of the white party ascended the grapevine ladder to the security of their platform. The natives climbed into the same tree, curled themselves up like so many animals, and fell asleep.

While Otter and Holton sat at one end of the platform and talked, Virginia Hart and Benton occupied the other side and looked out into the jungle. The rising moon began flooding the scene with yellow light.

"This all seems like some wild dream," Virginia mused, turning to Benton.

The latter caught the gleam of reflected moonlight in her eyes and answered after a moment of silence.

"Yes," he said. "It is difficult for me to realize our very strange position."

"I would not mind this experience so much," she continued, "but mother will give me up for dead. Father will not give up until the last effort has been expended."

"We will escape from our present predicament before long," Benton assured her. "If we cannot hope to scale the surrounding mountains, we still have one probable avenue of escape in the airplane. It has received a severe buffeting from the storm, but it may be possible to repair it. The only thing we lack is gasoline. There may be such a thing that crude oil exists in this valley at some point, though I hardly think so because of its apparent volcanic origin. We will reach home though sometime, I am sure."

The night was passed in comfort on the platform. Morning found everybody in good spirits. The members of the white party began to grasp the dialect of the natives and much progress was made during the day in that study.

Captain Holton and Benton, in company with Gomo and Mara, went to the place where the teeheemen had been killed, and Holton and Benton examined the carcass carefully and drew several sketches of it.

Three weeks later they again visited the carcass, which was beginning to shrivel from the exposure to the hot sun every day. Gomo explained to Holton that he and the other three had been placed there as a sacrifice to the teeheemen, of which there were two in the valley. A portion of his people had worshiped the teeheemen. Gomo and others had rebelled against the worship of the animals and the dictates of the high priest of the temple of his home city. As a result they had been thrown into prison by order of the king of the country.

As a penalty for their sacrilege, they had been brought to the haunts of the teeheemen and left there, bound, for the food of the flesh-eating monsters.

"There is still another of those devils in the country to be reckoned with," commented Holton as they were returning to camp. "We will be heralded as enemies of the king for killing one of his gods."

"Right you are," agreed Benton. "Is there not a way to leave this country?" he questioned, turning to Gomo.

Gomo shook his head.

"It will be best for us to live as we are," he advised. "Our first fathers came into this valley through a passageway that leads through one of the mountains. There is none today who knows this secret passageway except the high priest of the temple of teeheemen in the city of our king.

"He goes through the passageway every so often and brings back from the other world wonderful things of magic."

"To your way of thinking," said Benton, "where are the boundaries of the world in which you live?"

Gomo for answer pointed in a circular manner at the mountain peaks bordering all sides of the valley.

"None may pass there," he said. "At the top is the border of the land of death, the land of cold. Only after death may one stand the cold and pass through to the other world."

The men remained silent for a time after Gomo completed his explanation of what he believed to be the land of the hereafter.

"Rather peculiar belief," commented Holton. "From his statement, Gomo and his people are undoubtedly the descendants of parties who entered this valley years ago through some long-forgotten defile in the mountains. "It is possible that the priest of his tribe, as he says, does know the way out, but through superstition does not go into the outer world."

The men started in the direction of their camp and proceeded without further conversation. Gomo, who was leading the party, suddenly halted as they approached the camp and made a sign to the others that they should remain silent.

"What's up?" Benton queried, in a whisper.

Gomo answered in a low tone: "The other members of our camp have been surprized and captured by some of the king's warriors. We are surrounded now by the same people, I am certain, and they are waiting for a chance to spring upon us."

"We cannot afford to become separated from the other members of the party," Holton asserted. "Let us proceed and share their fate. Show no resistance. We may be able to work a bluff and get into the good graces of the king to such an extent that we may get out of our present isolated condition."

The men again advanced. As they walked into their camp they were suddenly surrounded by some fifty olive-colored warriors dressed in skins of animals and armed with long spears and rude knives.

Gomo addressed the warriors, who approached as he talked.

"Men of Teeheemen," he spoke; "where are the other people of the white face?"

Several of the more responsive warriors pointed with their spears toward a point farther in the jungle.

"Gomo must warn you to handle them with care. They are gods and carry the thunder and lightning that kills, with them."

"Teeheemen are greater," responded several of the warriors.

"Men of Teeheemen, you are mistaken," Gomo continued. "Such would I have thought had I been as you are now. Only a short time ago you took Gomo, Eppa, Mara and Gala

because of their disbelief in the deity of teeheemen and tied us where the animals you worship as your gods could feast upon our bodies. You tied us where hundreds of prisoners and enemies of the king have died before. You do not see the spirit of Gomo before you today, but Gomo in the body as he was a short time ago. The white gods saved him and his friends from the teeheemen. With their great thunder and lightning they slew one of the beasts. They killed the great god of the men of Teeheemen."

"Gomo lies," boldly asserted one of the chiefs of the war party.

Gomo drew himself to his full height. With a look of scorn on his face he replied: "Gomo speaks the truth. If Gomo lies, let him be sacrificed in the temple of Teeheemen. If the men of the king will go to the place where they placed Gomo, Eppa, Mara and Gala for the teeheemen to find them, they will see the carcass of their god, which stinks in the heat of the sun."

The chief addressed a few words to another warrior close by. Then he spoke to Gomo again.

"The men of Teeheemen will go to the spot. If Gomo has lied, then shall Gomo and his friends, including the white faces, be offered as sacrifices in the temple of Teeheemen."

The warrior to whom the chief had spoken left the circle, accompanied by two others, and hastened away through the jungle to the spot designated by Gomo. When they had departed Gomo, Mara, Holton and Benton were led to the spot where Van Otter, Virginia and Gala were stationed under the guard of a dozen olive-colored warriors.

Virginia Hart was the center of the glances of the members of the war party. The chief advanced close to her and gazed with mingled curiosity and admiration. Virginia shrank from before him and turned to Benton. He noticed her look of anxiety and spoke to reassure her.

"I believe that we are fortunate again," he said. "This war party finding us means that we shall be taken to the city of the men of Teeheemen. There we may be able to formulate plans that will result in our getting back to civilization."

"I hope you are correct, Mr. Benton," she replied. "What a wild lot of creatures they are! I cannot help but feel afraid of them."

"Keep your revolver always ready for an emergency," Benton advised. "That chief has taken a fancy to you. As long as we are permitted to retain our weapons we can always give a good account of ourselves."

Benton told Virginia and Otter of the three men who had been dispatched to the spot where the teeheemen had been killed.

"We must each play our part," he said. "We can work upon the ignorance of these natives for a time at least, and that may answer our purpose."

The warriors of Teeheemen seated themselves in a circle about their prisoners. The three men who had been sent to investigate the story of the killing of the teeheemen suddenly rushed into the middle of the circle. They fell upon their knees before Virginia Hart and her companions.

"Gomo speaks the truth," one of the messengers announced to the chief. "The teeheemen is dead!"

A hush fell upon the crowd of warriors, and they looked upon the white men with awe. Gomo was quick to take advantage of the silence.

"The people of the white face are displeased with the action of the men of Teeheemen," he said. "They must be taken to the city of the king and must be told the location of the secret passageway from the valley by the high priest. They desire to return again to the other world from whence they came."

The chief and his warriors consulted for a few minutes.

"Chief Bolga will do the bidding of the white gods," he announced. "They will lead the way to the city of Teeheemen. Bolga does not know the location of the secret passageway from the valley into the land of death. Only the high priest knows that, and he was told by the former high priest when the latter was on his death bed. The white gods must make their demand for the secret from the high priest of the temple of Teeheemen."

"We are going to get some place now," commented Otter. "Suppose the high priest balks and won't give us the secret, or fails to believe in us as this bunch have?"

"Don't borrow trouble, Herman," Holton advised. "We may be able to carry the deception through."

6

THE night was spent in the old encampment of the Holton party. The members of the white party were permitted to occupy the platform in the tree. The warriors of Teeheemen climbed into the surrounding trees and spent the night in safety from the clutches of the great beasts of the jungle below.

During the midnight hours, the hideous cry that had sounded through the forest the first night after the plane had alighted in the forest of Teeheemen again pealed forth in the distance. The various warriors stirred uneasily in their sleep and murmured "teeheemen."

The members of the white party on the platform in the gigantic tree roused and talked together.

"Teeheemen," remarked Benton.

"The companion of the one that is dead," said Holton.

The forest again became quiet and the members of the party once more fell asleep. Morning broke with a bustle of activity in the camp.

"Today we begin the march to the city of Teeheemen," Benton commented to Virginia as the final preparations for the trip were completed.

"I am glad of it," she replied. "I have grown weary of this great forest solitude and I believe that I would welcome the sight of most anything that resembled a city."

Chief Bolga gave final orders to his warriors and the entire party moved from the scene of the white encampment toward the city of Teeheemen.

Chief Bolga walked by the side of Gomo and Mara, who, with Eppa and the girl, Gala, kept close to the white members of the procession.

Gomo and Bolga engaged in conversation as they walked along, and Holton and Benton, who were best versed in the native language, caught a lot of information from their talk.

"Is Urlus still king?" Gomo questioned.

"He is," Bolga replied, "but revolution will break some day. Young Duros is even now completing plans for overthrowing the government. Duros is like you, Gomo. He no longer accepts the belief of teeheemen and the orders of the high priest."

"Nor do you, Bolga," Gomo challenged. "You have kept silent. If revolution does break I prophesy that it shall find Bolga on the side of young Duros and fighting with his forces."

Bolga did not reply.

"What brought you and your war party to this section of the valley?" asked Gomo.

"King Urlus sent us to see if the teeheemen had eaten you and the others who were offered for sacrifice. We found strange tracks about the jungle, the trail left by the white gods. We followed and spied upon you for two suns. Then the two white gods left, and we surrounded the others and captured them."

The conversation was interrupted by a series of wild cries from the van-

guard of the procession. Hastening forward Holton and Benton learned that one of the natives had been seized by a wild animal and carried away.

"Begri!" exclaimed the excited warriors. "He has seized Mega, the son of Bolga!"

Gomo advanced to the side of Benton and indicated the direction the wild beast had taken through the tall grass which, in places, grew higher than a man since they left the small desert behind.

"Come, Bolga," he said; "we will slay the beast that has taken Mega!"

Bolga hastened to join the rescuing party, and while the main band remained stationary, Benton and Holton, accompanied by the chief, and Gomo with several warriors, took the direction indicated by Gomo, in which the beast had gone.

"The begri will not carry its victim far," Gomo explained with confidence. "Then the white faces can kill it with their thunder sticks. Let Chief Bolga see your power."

"Gomo has a lot of confidence in our ability," remarked Benton to Holton, as they proceeded cautiously forward.

"We will have to make good," Holton replied. "I think Gomo believes but little in our godship, but he is using us quite craftily to save his own bacon with his people by showing how he found favor in our sight and was rescued by us."

Gomo, who led the advance, suddenly halted.

"There!" he said, pointing through the tall grass.

Benton and Holton caught sight of the beast called begri as they gazed in the direction pointed by Gomo.

"An enormous tiger!" exclaimed Benton excitedly. "It has just dropped its victim, who is feigning dead!"

Holton and Benton raised their rifles and aimed at the great beast. The animal, with one of its huge paws still on its prey, slunk into a half crouch at sight of the intruders.

"Watch, Bolga!" Gomo called to his fellow.

The reports of the two rifles sounded almost simultaneously. The great cat, half crouching above the body of Mega, sprang a few feet and fell. It rolled over several times, clawing and biting at the grass, then, after a number of convulsive struggles, remained motionless. Holton and Benton advanced and viewed their kill while Gomo and Bolga rushed to where Mega was lying.

The natives raised the son of the chief and found that he was still breathing. The teeth of the tiger had passed through his skin clothing, and by this the great beast had carried him away into the tall grass with the ease of a cat carrying a mouse.

"Another antiquity," Holton commented, as he kicked the massive head of the beast. "A saber-tooth tiger."

Benton nodded assent and then turned toward the place where Gomo and Bolga were working over the young man.

"More frightened than injured," was Benton's comment as Mega opened his eyes and looked wildly about. Blood still trickled from a cut in his back where the teeth of the tiger had opened the flesh.

Finally, realizing that he had been rescued, Mega, with the assistance of his father, rose to his feet. Slowly the five returned to the main body.

A wild yell was emitted by the warriors when they saw Mega returning again with Bolga, his father, supporting him.

Gomo immediately launched into one of his characteristic speeches and described in detail the slaying of the begri. When he finished, the entire native assemblage fell at the feet of Virginia Hart and her three companions.

Then they rose, and a dozen of the men rushed to the spot where the tiger

had been killed. In a few minutes they returned to the main body, bearing the carcass of the great cat.

At this point, the foresight and craftiness of Gomo again asserted itself.

"We will skin the begri," he told Holton, "and take the pelt to the king. Then will he be compelled to believe the stories we have to tell of your greatness."

While part of the warriors removed the skin of the tiger, the others stood by and watched the operation. They talked in low tones among themselves and glanced frequently toward the three white men and Virginia.

Gomo and Mara walked chestily about while Gala and old Eppa remained apart from the others and watched first the Holton party and then the warriors engaged in skinning the giant begri.

When the pelt had been removed from the animal, Bolga made a speech. He recalled in detail the killing of the fierce begri, and with a great flood of oratory that brought a shout from the assembled warriors, denounced the deity of teeheemen and expressed his allegiance to the white gods, who had come into the country to rule over the terrible beasts of Teeheemen Valley. He cautioned his followers, however, that they must not make known to the king or his subjects their change of belief until the king and his subjects had also been convinced of the power of the white faces.

"Then," he concluded, "we can tell of our changed views without danger to our lives at the hands of King Urlus or his high priest."

The march for the city of Teeheemen was again resumed, and continued until late in the day.

"We shall arrive at the city of Teeheemen in another sun," Gomo announced to the members of the white party.

When the sun was again making its last descent toward the western horizon, the party suddenly emerged upon the banks of a small river that flowed toward the distant mountain range in the direction of the city of Teeheemen.

"This is the sacred river of Teeheemen," Gomo explained, pausing by the side of Benton. "It is from its waters that the beasts, which the people of this land worship, drink once a week. The river flows toward the city of Teeheemen. Near the temple of Teeheemen it enters the base of the mountain and into its waters are poured the surplus blood of the sacrifices offered on the altar of the temple; and into its waters also the bodies of the victims are cast when life has ceased."

7

CAMP was made that night amid a clump of scrub trees of a species unknown to the party. The line of the stream marked the end of the treeless plain which the expedition had crossed, and heavy growths of timber were encountered again on every hand.

The natives gathered grass and brush, and Otter again created much wonderment among the warriors of the Bolga party by striking a match and lighting the pile of grass and light brush that had been gathered for kindling a fire.

All night the fire was kept going by warriors, who took turns in the night in keeping the blaze burning brightly. For Virginia Hart the night was one of almost sleepless dread. She fancied at times that through the darkness beyond the circle of light created by the fire she could detect the eyes of great animals of the night prowling near by. Weariness finally dispelled her fears and she slept soundly.

When Virginia awoke it was to find preparations for breakfast about completed. Of all the party, she alone had slept on undisturbed. Gomo, noting her slumber, had cautioned the other warriors to remain quiet.

Part of the war party went into the adjoining territory and returned later with a species of deer which they had surprized at a water place and slain. The venison had been dressed and placed on a rudely constructed spit to roast above a large bed of coals.

Virginia arose and arranged her hair for the day. The sight of her long brown locks with their natural curl aroused much curiosity among the members of the Bolga party, and many exclamations of admiration passed among them.

When breakfast had been concluded the march toward the city of Teeheemen again was resumed. It continued without incident during the day, and toward evening Gomo, who was walking near Benton, pointed toward the foothills of the mountains in the distance.

"Teeheemen," he said. "My home."

Benton and the other members of the white party strained their eyes in the direction indicated by Gomo and got their first glance of the domain of King Urlus.

"It is there," Gomo explained, as they viewed the outlines of what appeared to be a high wall from above which arose numerous higher structures. "There the king of my people lives. It is he and the high priest of the temple of Teeheemen who condemned Gomo and his friends to death. Gomo is returning at the risk of being again condemned to death unless the white faces can save him."

"We'll try, Gomo," Holton assured. "But, Gomo, we have no desire to deceive you. We are not gods, but men of flesh and blood like yourself, although of another color."

"Gomo had surmised that such was the case," replied the big fellow in a whisper. "Bolga thinks that you are gods and so do the others. Let them continue so to believe. We can convince King Urlus of the things that have impressed Chief Bolga. The high priest of the temple of Teeheemen is more powerful than the king. He alone knows the passage to the land of the hereafter. He it is who escorts the spirits of the dead from the temple of Teeheemen to the passageway that leads to the land of the hereafter. He is the one we must convince of your deity."

"We will stand together," Holton replied. "Your life depends on us fully as much as ours depends on the ability you possess in helping us put the deception over on the king and his high priest."

"We shall enter the city tonight," said Gomo. "We must go in as prisoners of Chief Bolga. The latter is much impressed with you and your power to destroy the fierce animals of the valley where we live. We shall spend the night in the city prison and be taken in the morning before the court of the king."

The party approached the wall of the city of Teeheemen. Holton and Benton discussed the construction of the wall and expressed surprize at finding what appeared to be a city of no mean construction in such a wild country.

"There is one thing certain," Holton expressed, "and that is, the men of Teeheemen are not inefficient at city building."

"We have certainly landed in a strange country," Benton said. "If we can put it over on the king of this place and his high priest, we ought to be marching through the mountains in a few days into the outside world and then on to civilization. It is a peculiar circumstance that we should find a tribe of men living in a great crater valley, who know nothing of the outside world except as a land where their souls migrate after death."

The party approached close to the wall of the city, and soon a portion of the structure opened and all marched through the passage that suddenly came into view. When they

had entered, the wall again closed behind them.

A number of warriors in charge of the gateway questioned Bolga and other members of his war party. They viewed with great curiosity the four white people and listened with increasing wonderment at the story of the killing of the begri. Gomo then was called and told with dramatic bursts of oratory of the saving of himself and companions from the charging teeheemen.

Bolga then addressed the guards of the gate and corroborated the story as told by Gomo. He related in detail the story of the saving of his son from the begri and told how the teeheemen was found by his messengers dead on the scene where Gomo, Eppa, Mara and Gala had been left.

The guards of the gateway were much impressed and the chief of the guards then preceded the other members of the party. The march through one of the streets of Teeheemen began. But few residents of the city were on the street. These, when they spied the four white people, became excited and called queries to the members of Bolga's party.

The warriors of Bolga's detachment finally halted before a massive structure hewn apparently from solid stone. A doorway slid open as the gate in the outer wall of the city had done. The prisoners entered and Virginia Hart and her three companions found themselves in a large court from which issued a passageway to adjoining rooms.

"The white woman will come with Gala," the chief of the guards advised.

Virginia with some apprehension left the others, as had been commanded. The chief led her and Gala to a room adjoining the main court and told her that she should remain there for the night.

Holton, Otter and Benton were accompanied to a similar room, and Gomo, Eppa and Mara were placed in another room as prisoners of the king under guard.

8

WHEN the chief of the gate guards had left the apartment assigned to her, Virginia inspected the place in the rapidly fading light of day. Fresh air and light were admitted to the place through a window hewn in the roof overhead. The window was covered with a heavy grating of some kind of metal.

"We are now prisoners of King Urlus," Gala explained as she noted the survey being taken by Virginia of their apartment. "Gala's white sister alone can save her from the wrath of the king when he discovers that she has not died in the sacrificial place of the teeheemen."

"I will do my best, Gala," Virginia assured her. "I am but a woman, too. I hope that we shall not be compelled to remain long in this place."

An hour passed before a warrior entered the room and placed a tray of food before the two women. When he withdrew, the opening from the room into the hallway that led into the main court closed after him.

"We shall be here without interruption until morning," said Gala.

"I hope you are correct," replied Virginia. "I always feel creepy when one of those spearmen come near me. They all look so fiercely at me."

"They will not dare bother you so long as you are a prisoner of King Urlus," said Gala. "Only the king may do as he sees fit with the prisoners, with the permission of the high priest. The latter has even greater power than the king. The strongest man of the nation always accompanies the high priest. He is the high priest's protector, and should physical evil befall the priest the guard of the priest must suffer the penalty of death.

"I have learned since our arrival that tomorrow is the day set for the great athletic games when they determine in the arena of Teeheemen who is the strongest man and who shall be the body guard of the priest of Teeheemen. Banrup is the priest's guard now. He won at last year's games. He will, of course, be given a chance to retain his title by competing with the other men of Teeheemen who may care to try for his position in any line of physical endeavor."

The conversation was interrupted by the sliding aside of the door in the outer passageway.

Into the room came two men, accompanied by the warrior who had brought the food earlier in the evening. Gala recognized the men who had entered and shuddered for a moment. "The high priest Walum and his bodyguard, Banrup," she whispered to Virginia as the two approached.

Virginia rose and stood before the two as they advanced close to her and Gala. The warrior remained near the doorway and listened in silence as the high priest and his personal guard inspected the captives and talked together.

Virginia noted the powerful physique of the olive-colored Banrup and felt a shudder pass over her as she became conscious of his gaze of admiration for her. The high priest, arrayed in a long robe of brightly colored skins adorned with various emblems, gazed for a long time at the features of the girl.

The story of the slaying of the teeheemen had been reported to the temple where the priest and his guard held sway. They had deemed it necessary that they should immediately inspect the men who had killed the great animal which they had been accustomed to worship because of its supreme power over all the other animals of the mountain-bound valley.

"Gala," the priest commanded, in a guttural voice, "tell the story of the death of the teeheemen."

Gala, her voice trembling with fear, told how she had been saved from the god of her people by the white men Otter and Benton.

When she had concluded, the priest could ill conceal his wrath. For many years he had been high priest of the temple of Teeheemen and had preyed upon the ignorance and superstition of the people he served. He saw the prospect of his being displaced as the supreme ruler of the people of Teeheemen and craftily began to plan the retention of that power.

"The great games are tomorrow," the priest announced. "Walum will determine then whether the white gods are real or only men of flesh and blood. He has viewed the other three white gods and Walum knows that the spirit of the teeheemen which is dead is displeased with the white faces. It wishes that they might be fed to its mate, the other teeheemen."

Banrup then spoke.

"Tomorrow will Banrup again be proclaimed guard over the high priest of Teeheemen," he said. "Gala may be saved, and her white sister, too, for they have found favor in the eyes of Banrup. He will take them to live with him in the temple of Teeheemen as his wives."

He placed a massive hand on the shoulder of Gala, and as the girl shrank from him he laughed loudly. He did not touch Virginia, but with a last look at her he followed the high priest from the chamber.

Virginia and Gala remained silent in the darkness that enshrouded the chamber when the stone panel had again closed across the entry.

"Gala," she spoke, "tomorrow we must escape from the city of Teeheemen."

9

EXCEPT for the visit, the preceding evening, of Walum the high priest and Banrup the guard, Benton, Holton and Otter spent the night in their prison chamber without incident.

The panel in the doorway slid aside shortly after daybreak and a warrior entered with an assortment of food for their breakfast.

An hour later the three were led from their room into the large outer court. Then Virginia and Gala were brought in, and soon Gomo, Eppa and Mara emerged from an adjacent corridor, preceded by guards.

"We are to be questioned today by the king in his court," Gomo informed them as he grasped the hands of the three white men.

"We'll want to work our bluff for all there is in it," suggested Benton. "If we cannot put it over on his kingship I fancy that we may become fodder for the other living teeheemen."

"You're right," returned Holton. "I gather from what I have heard that today is to be a kind of a national holiday in this country, and we may be used to furnish part of the sport."

The chief of the prison entered, accompanied by Chief Bolga. The entire party then left the prison and proceeded along one of the city streets. The news of the white faces had spread from mouth to mouth in the city, and a large crowd lined the sides of the roadway to catch a glimpse of Bolga and his prisoners as they were marched through the streets toward the palace of King Urlus.

The palace was approached and the white men commented regarding the appearance of the structure from the outside. It was fashioned from massive stones placed with engineering exactness. A double tower surmounted the main body of the building and rose to a dizzy height, being the tallest elevation in the city of Teeheemen. A portion of ground several acres in extent surrounded the palace and constituted the private garden of the king.

Chief Bolga headed the procession into the palace. A massive panel of solid stone moved aside as the party approached the wall.

The members of the detachment, after passing through, found themselves in an enormous room. At one end was a throne surrounded on either side by hideous stone images of the head of the beast that the members of the white party readily recognized as a teeheemen.

The procession halted and waited in silence. A blast from a trumpet sounded somewhere in an adjoining corridor, and soon the royal procession appeared. A dozen powerful warriors armed to the teeth with spears and long knives entered first. Then came six young women, naked except for a trapping of brilliantly colored skins about their loins. The six bore small statuettes of the head of the teeheemen at the end of long pedestals. Then came the king himself.

King Urlus was a powerful man physically. Six feet in height and still in the prime of life, he indeed assumed a kingly manner. He wore a costume of delicately tinted skins, not inartistic in arrangement. On his head he wore a crown of metal fashioned in the image of a teeheemen's head. The crown was brilliant with jewels that flashed as the king moved through the sunlight streaming into the room from the overhead window.

Following the king came the high priest Walum, and behind Walum came Banrup, the greatest athlete in the valley of Teeheemen.

The royal party approached the throne, and King Urlus ascended the stairs and seated himself. The six maidens placed the pedestals one on each of the steps leading to the throne. The twelve warriors ranged them-

selves on the steps, six on a side. Gomo was called to come forward.

The big fellow advanced from the group where he had been standing, and with arms folded stood before the foot of the throne.

"Tell us, Gomo," Urlus commanded, "why you have committed such a sacrilege as to defy again the gods teeheemen by escaping from them when you had been placed as a sacrifice before them?"

Gomo answered, and his voice assumed a sepulchral tone as he spoke. He narrated, as he had done so many times before, the story of the slaying of the teeheemen.

Urlus listened attentively, and silence reigned as Gomo proceeded. He finished with the tale of the teeheemen's death and then related with dramatic oratory the slaying of the begri that had carried away the son of Chief Bolga. As a dramatic finish he went to the warrior who had brought the skin of the great cat with him.

Taking the tiger's skin from the other man, Gomo spread the pelt before the king. Urlus rose from his throne and descended. He examined the pelt with much interest, then resumed his seat on the throne. The king was visibly impressed with the power of the white faces.

Walum, the high priest, alone stood skeptical, and finally addressed the king.

"Urlus, king of Teeheemen," he spoke, "you have heard the story of the white gods. Walum believes they have done great things but that they are not as great as the gods of Teeheemen. Gomo has said that they carry the thunder and lightning with them. Walum does not believe that. Let the white faces match their strength against the great Banrup. If they are stronger than he, then will Walum say that they are more than men, that they are gods."

"The white faces do not care to dwell in the land of Teeheemen," Gomo advised. "They desire to be taken to the passageway through the mountains to the land of the hereafter, whence they came. They are gods and are greater than teeheemen, but they are willing to leave the valley of Teeheemen and let teeheemen be the god of the people of the valley."

Walum shook his head.

"The passageway through the sacred mountain is for the spirits only," he said. "Men of flesh and blood are not permitted to pass through."

Urlus listened to the words of the high priest.

"Let the white woman stand before the king," he commanded.

Virginia advanced and stood as ordered. Urlus again rose, and descended to the lower level. Benton advanced closer to Virginia and rested his hand on his holster, for the revolver was a quicker weapon of defense than the rifle he carried.

"The white woman finds favor with the king," said Urlus. "If she is not a goddess, then will King Urlus take her to wife in his palace, and she may be spared from the sacrifice in the temple and the woods where the teeheemen dwell. Urlus will think for another sun what to do with Gomo and his white-faced friends. Let them be taken to the great games in the arena of Teeheemen. If they are greater than the men of Teeheemen, they can demonstrate their power there."

The king raised his hands as a signal that the session was at a close. Bolga again led the party back toward the prison of Teeheemen.

"There's one that we are not going to get by," said Benton, "and that is the high priest. That fellow is a crafty old crook. He plays horse with the entire outfit. If he knows the passageway to the outer world he'll

never reveal it to us. He's picked us for fodder for his pet god."

Holton nodded.

"We must make an attempt to escape before another sunrise," he said. "We must plan quickly. If we can bribe one of the guards who operates the doorway to the rooms in which we are locked we can get away."

"I am ready to make the attempt," Virginia said. "Last night I made the resolution that I would escape alone if the opportunity ever presents itself."

"We will all be placed in the same quarters as last night, I suppose," said Benton. "It is up to us men to get out in some manner and liberate you women. Gomo says that the temple of Teeheemen joins the prison where we are confined. It is from the prison that the victims for sacrifice are taken to the temple and slaughtered under the direction of old Walum. I have a hunch that the secret passageway through the mountains joins the temple of Teeheemen. No one is permitted in the temple but Walum and his pet guard of picked warriors.

"If we could get away and hide somewhere in the city and explore the temple we might find the way out of the valley. We're going to have to get busy, and that mighty soon."

The doorway of the prison entrance was again reached. Slowly the stone panel slid away. The party entered and was again divided as it had been the night before.

"You will remain in your chambers until afternoon," Chief Bolga informed the various parties. "Then you will be taken to view the great annual spectacle of the games in the arena of Teeheemen."

10

THE sun had almost reached the zenith when the door closing the passage of the room occupied by Holton, Benton and Otter opened. Chief Bolga entered, and with him was a younger man. The latter was tall and of powerful physique. The three men were at once attracted by his well formed features and graceful carriage.

"This is Duros," Bolga introduced him. "He has come as the guest of Bolga to visit the white gods."

In regular American style Duros extended his hand to each of the three men in turn. They noted the powerful muscular development of the arms and each felt that for some unknown reason they had found a friend in this land of uncertainty.

"Duros would like to examine your thundersticks," said Bolga.

Holton handed him his rifle, which was leaning in a convenient position against the wall with the weapons of Benton and Otter. Duros examined the weapon minutely and shook his head.

"I do not know," he said, "but Duros would feel safer in the jungle or in battle with a spear or a long knife."

The two left the chamber and as the door closed Holton spoke.

"That's the fellow Gomo told us is the rival of King Urlus. I feel somehow or other that there is a real revolution brewing in this place. Chief Bolga is undoubtedly in cahoots with Duros. Some day they will bump off Urlus and overthrow the temple of Teeheemen. That will be the end then of old Walum. Duros wanted to get a good look at us. I expect him to make some kind of proposition to us if we will assist him in his revolution."

"If that will insure the safety of Miss Hart," Benton said, "we can well afford to get into the plan. I feel that we are in duty bound to do everything possible to aid in returning her to her home and parents."

"I'm with you," Otter remarked. "I'd rather mix in a revolution or something than be cooped up here and

finally fed to an animal that's supposed to be extinct."

The sun passed the meridian of its daily journey, and after the noon meal had been served the prisoners were again assembled in the main court of the prison.

"We'll probably see something this afternoon worth remembering," said Benton as he greeted Virginia Hart.

"I hope something will develop that will bring things to a climax one way or the other," she replied.

The signal was given to advance, and the party moved from the prison into the street. The march to the arena occupied some fifteen minutes.

The members of the party ascended a flight of stone stairs and were led through a wide corridor that opened into a circular arena of enormous size. The seats were nearly all occupied, and as the white men emerged into view a buzz of excited talk began from thousands of natives in the great structure where they were seated.

The games of the afternoon started. A fast race around the inside ring of the arena took place among a number of the younger men. Banrup was in charge of the games in the arena and as winner of last year's events could enter any contest he saw fit.

"The greatest event of the afternoon will be the battle between Banrup and a warrior who is aspiring to the position of guard of the high priest of Teeheemen," Gomo informed them. "Their battle will be with bare fists. I feel that the challenger has little chance of defeating the mighty Banrup. Their event will take place next."

A ring had been drawn in the sand in the center of the arena and in a few minutes a man of large physique walked from one of the dressing rooms in the lower part of the arena toward it. A great shout went up as he appeared.

Banrup then went toward the circle. Several other members of the royal household, accompanied by King Urlus, then went to the ringside. It was announced that the king should be judge of the contest, as was the usual custom. The challenger and Banrup entered the circle and prepared for battle.

"Madison Square Garden never had anything on this," remarked Otter, who was becoming greatly interested in the coming affray. "By the way, Benton," he continued, "do you remember that this is the afternoon I was scheduled to fight for the championship of the world?"

Benton nodded.

"I thought about that this morning," he replied. "You're out of the game for a time at least. What is your opinion of the two men who are out there in the ring?"

"A couple of big dubs," Otter replied. "Any good light heavyweight back home could knock either of them for a row of old-fashioned beer kegs."

The two men in the circle became the center of thousands of eyes. King Urlus gave the word and both rushed toward each other with the fury of angry bulls. The fight was short. Banrup caught his adversary on the jaw with a right hook and the latter went down. King Urlus viewed the fallen man, and when the latter showed no inclination to renew the fight he went into the circle and touched Banrup with his scepter.

The roar of thousands of throats sounded as the action of the king thus proclaimed Banrup the guard of the priest of Teeheemen for the ensuing year.

When the shouting had died away, Banrup began walking about the arena issuing defiances to any one who might care to battle with him. He finally approached the place where the white men and Virginia Hart were seated.

Banrup paused. He saw Virginia, and for a moment his eyes rested greedily upon her.

"Banrup is greatest in the land of Teeheemen," he suddenly challenged. "Banrup will fight any man. Banrup is not even afraid to fight the white gods."

His announcement was greeted with an air of astonished silence.

Banrup continued: "If any of the white men would fight Banrup, let them come into the arena and battle for the place of guard of the high priest of Teeheemen."

Intense silence reigned for a time in the great assemblage.

Again the big olive-colored athlete issued his challenge.

"Banrup defies the white gods. If they are more powerful than the gods of Teeheemen, let them battle with Banrup."

A wild yell of applause ensued at the last challenge of Banrup. The loyal followers of Duros alone remained silent.

Otter, who had been reclining in a nonchalant manner in his stone chair, suddenly rose to his feet before Benton or Holton could restrain him.

"The guard of the high priest is a big mut," returned Otter, addressing Banrup in the Teeheemen language. "Herman Van Otter of the white gods is greater and will battle with Banrup in the arena for the position of guard of the priest of Teeheemen."

A shout, not so loud as that which had greeted the last challenge of Banrup, ensued from the followers of Duros.

Otter leaped into the arena with the agility of a great cat.

"Come on, Benton," he called. "I want you and Gomo to act as my seconds."

Benton and Gomo followed Otter, as the latter had desired, and the three strode across the arena, the two white men carrying their rifles. They went to the circle in the sand where the battle between Banrup and his challenger had taken place a few minutes before.

Banrup and King Urlus, with the same retinue that had accompanied the king to the ringside before, also walked toward the center of the arena.

Otter removed his shirt, and Benton and Gomo both expressed pleasure at the sight of their friend's wonderful physical development.

"I was billed for a big scrap in New York today," Otter commented, "and this one will keep me from being disappointed. As I understand it, this bunch has no rounds during the fight. It is a finish battle, or free for all from the start until the poorest man is knocked cold or refuses to fight any more."

"That is their method," Gomo nodded. "You must not let Banrup get a blow at your face, for he is powerful."

"Leave that to me," grinned Otter. "I doubt if that big cheese has very much science in his mits."

11

IN HER seat in the great open air auditorium, Virginia Hart clapped her hands and joined in the applause that greeted the action of Otter from the followers of Duros.

"Can he win?" she finally asked, turning to Holton, who was seated at her side.

"I think so," Holton replied, "but this man Banrup is a powerful fellow. He must be, or he would not have acquired the position he holds among the people of his country."

"Should Otter fail to win, then what?" Virginia questioned.

Holton was silent for a minute before answering, for the same thought had occurred to him.

"I am confident that Otter will win," he replied.

The two men in the arena made final preparations for their battle. King Urlus then announced the rules for the contest. The word was given and Banrup and Otter rushed to the center of the ring.

Banrup made a mighty swing at Otter's head. Otter ducked the blow and sent a smashing right to Banrup's jaw. The head of the big fellow was rocked by the terrific impact and a great roar went up from the galleries where the Duros faction was seated.

Banrup swung blindly at Otter, who was quick to sense the advantage he had obtained at the onset of the battle. For a few seconds he dodged and ducked the blows struck by Banrup. Then Otter assumed the offensive. Parrying several of Banrup's blows, he got in close to his adversary's body.

He shot a smashing right to Banrup's heart and sent a left hook to the jaw. Banrup rallied and rushed Otter, attempting to land a blow upon Otter's face or head.

Otter parried the blows, and the end came quickly. Otter sent another terrific blow to Banrup's heart and then crashed a powerful right blow to his jaw. Banrup went down in a heap. The cheers from the stands became pandemonium. Warriors of the Duros faction threw their spears into the air and caught them again with great dexterity.

In the arena Banrup gamely struggled to his feet. He rushed blindly at Otter. The latter was waiting. Another right crashed against the vulnerable point of Banrup's jaw. This time the big guard went down and remained motionless.

Several members of the royal household rushed to Banrup and began working over him. King Urlus entered the ring and touched Otter with his scepter. A multitude of warriors suddenly began leaping from the stands where they had been seated. Duros was at the head of the crowd. King Urlus saw them and fled toward the opposite side of the arena.

"Great are the white gods," Duros called forth. "Down with the gods teeheemen!"

From the stand in the opposite side of the arena another crowd of men came pouring forth.

"Down with Duros!" they called. "Great are the teeheemen! Down with the white gods!"

"They are the followers of Urlus," Benton exclaimed to Otter, who had again put on his clothing and taken up his weapons.

"What does it all mean, Gomo?" Otter questioned.

"Revolution has broken forth. The forces of Duros are about to strike at the men of Urlus."

Gomo was correct. At a thousand points in the great arena men began battling with terrific fury. Hundreds went down in the dust, shrieking their death cries of agony.

"We must get back to Virginia and Holton," Benton urged. "Let us go to them. We do not know which direction to shoot in this mess. We are liable to kill men favorable to us as well as those who are opposed to us."

Accompanied by Gomo, the two men started toward the gallery where they had left Virginia and Holton. A half dozen olive warriors suddenly confronted their advance toward the stands.

"They are followers of Urlus," Gomo warned, and raising his spear he hurled it with terrific force at one of the men.

The spear crashed into the man's body and passed half through. Benton and Otter brought their rifles to their shoulders and fired. Two more adversaries went down, and the others turned to flee at the sound of the reports.

Gomo gave a yell of delight. Recovering his spear from the body of his fallen enemy, he started in pursuit of the others.

"Stay with us, Gomo," Benton commanded. "We will need you to pilot us."

Gomo was filled with the excitement of the battle going on all about them.

"Great is Duros!" he called aloud. "The white gods have spoken and two more of the followers of teeheemen have fallen."

The fact was rapidly communicated down the line of the followers of Duros.

"The white gods are fighting with us," was roared out by the followers of that chieftain, and with redoubled fury they fell upon the forces of Urlus.

Although the men of Duros were giving a good account of themselves, they were not so numerous as the followers of the king. Reinforcements constantly entered the arena in behalf of the latter.

Duros found himself in a close position. With his spear he alone had dispatched a dozen of his adversaries. Suddenly he found himself confronted by a score of the most powerful of the warriors of the Urlus army. They had sought out Duros at the order of their king with a view of killing him and thus putting down the revolution. With two followers, Duros formed the center of a ring and battled heroically against the odds opposed to him.

In their trip to the stands, Benton, Otter and Gomo passed close to the scene of the unequal conflict. Gomo quickly called the attention of the two to the spot. Benton and Otter raised their rifles and poured a fusillade into the warriors attacking Duros and his two companions. Eight of the olive-colored giants fell and the remainder fled.

Duros was jubilant. He rushed for a moment to Benton and Otter.

"The white gods have saved Duros," he exclaimed. "Duros will not forget when he is king of Teeheemen."

With a hurried salute, the aspiring chieftain left them and again rushed into the conflict raging close by.

Benton and Otter approached the stand. Following the lead of Gomo, they entered the gallery where they had left Virginia and Holton. When they entered the stand the place was empty. Holton and Virginia had disappeared.

12

VIRGINIA HART had been an enthusiastic witness of the battle in the arena between Banrup and Otter. When the mighty guard of the high priest fell for the last time before the powerful blows of Otter, she rose to her feet by the side of Holton and mingled her applause with the cheers of the followers of Duros.

"What are they going to do now?" she asked, turning to Holton, when she saw hundreds of warriors begin leaping from the galleries into the arena.

"I do not know," he replied. "The followers of Duros appear to be leaping into the arena, and those coming from the opposite side must be the adherents of King Urlus. I think there's real trouble coming."

Gala, who was standing by Virginia, spoke.

"It is the climax of the plot to overthrow King Urlus," she said. "The warriors will fight for possession of the city—and may the men of Duros win!"

Holton viewed the scene and spoke quickly.

"We cannot hope to rejoin Benton and Otter at present. We must get to a place of safety if possible. Gala, you know the city. Where can we go and be among the friends of young Duros?"

"The supporters of Duros live mostly on the side of the city where the sun sets," the girl explained. "The temple of Teeheemen and the king's palace are on the side where the sun rises, and most of the king's followers live on that side."

"Lead us, then," Holton commanded, "to the place where we may expect to find the friends of Duros."

The three turned and started to leave the gallery. They entered the passageway through which they had come to the stand. As they did so, some fifty olive-colored warriors confronted them. With the warriors was a familiar figure.

"The high priest and his crowd!" Holton exclaimed, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

The mob of warriors rushed upon Holton, and before he could fire half a dozen shots they had seized the rifle and borne him to the ground. Virginia and Gala fought their assailants, but were quickly overpowered and treated roughly.

Holton's arms were pinioned behind his back with leather thongs. Several warriors lifted him and carried him from the place. Other warriors carried the two women.

"Place them in the prison," Walum commanded, with a grin of satisfaction as they were hurried past him.

A hurried march brought the party to the prison. The outer door opened and the three were taken inside. Holton was thrown into a chamber without his bonds being removed, and Virginia and Gala were thrust into another room of the place. Before the doorway was closed across the entrance to their chamber, Walum, the high priest, entered.

"Walum will make the white face his wife," he announced. "She shall live in the temple of Teeheemen."

"The white woman will never live with Walum," Virginia replied indignantly. "She will die before she will become the wife of such a creature as the high priest."

Walum smiled dangerously, and his eyes glittered.

"If the woman of the white face does not do the bidding of Walum, then shall her life-blood drip from the altar of Teeheemen in the temple thereof."

With grim silence Walum left the chamber and the doorway closed after him.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

In WEIRD TALES for January

OUT OF THE LONG AGO

A TALE OF HEREDITY

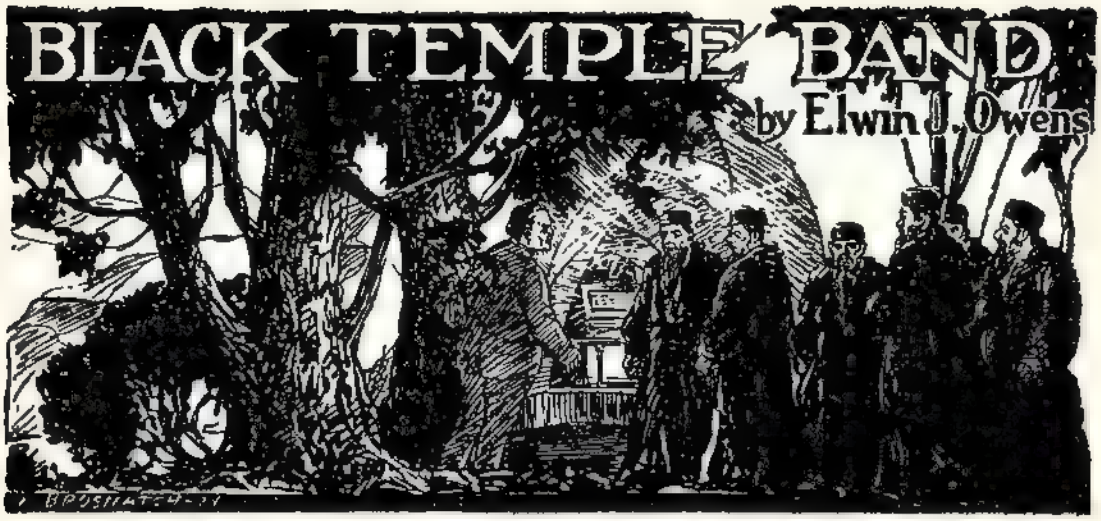
By SEABURY QUINN

This story of werewolves will make the thrills chase up and down your back. The fight between the Mohawk Indian and the bugwolf on a dolmen in Wales is a veritable masterpiece of weird literature

On Sale December 1

BLACK TEMPLE BAND

by Elwin J. Owens



"Author of "Mystery River" and "Six Bearded Men"

"HALT!"

"Seize him!"

"Throttle his throat!"

"Bind him, hand and foot!"

"The burlap about him and to the car!"

The steel-like commands followed each other in well timed succession. The voice of the leader was purposely muffled, but each word was clear-cut, sharply and quickly spoken.

With measured step, from out the quietude of the partially illuminated, seemingly deserted street, six men had emerged. They offered not a comment, neither did they tarry; each man knew his particular part of the program, and all acted quickly and with precision.

In the twinkling of an eye, the aged Kleg Pantzar, gagged, bound, and heavily wrapped in a covering that smelled of harness leather, was lifted from his feet.

The leader signaled the others to follow.

They pushed through the willowy brush, and behind the large signboards that hid them from the street. Across the vacant lot they went to the darkness of the alley.

"The plank, and strap him!"

The leader's words were more stern, more frigid than before.

Pantzar was stood upright, and two men held him thus, while three others placed the plank at his back. Three surcingles were slipped about him—one at his feet, one about his waist and one about the shoulders—and all were tightly drawn.

"He'll make a fine specimen of a mummy when we're done with him. jeered one in an undertone.

The leader sprang quickly forward and, touching the speaker lightly on the arm, spoke in low, cautious tones:

"This, I deem, is no place for jest. The guardians of the city's peace may soon be upon us. Leave your tormenting until we are in the distant spot, secure from the jurisdiction of courts and the eyes of men."

The leader swung quarter round and gestured toward the waiting truck.

"Slide the burlaped body in, and let it lie flat on the vehicle's metal bed.

A murmured word, and the helpless Pantzar was tipped backward, lifted, and slipped within the waiting car.

Two men mounted to the driver's seat, one sat on either of the flaring sides and two climbed in at the rear.

The motor spun. There was the grinding of the meshing gears, and soon they were out upon the city's thoroughfare. With darkened lamps, the car crept on to the unpaved streets of the sleeping suburbs.

A quick turn that threw the bound body to one side, and the motor belched aloud. Now they were safe. The lights flared out into the murkiness of an unlighted night. Down went the lever on the quadrant and the car lunged forward furiously.

ON AND on they went, over rough and smooth, up hill and down; a black, humming demon in the stillness of the damp, pitch-black night.

There was a whispered word. The motor was slowed down and, at a divergence of the road, the car leaped to the left. For miles they bumped along a narrow, timber-flanked byway.

Again the engine ceased to labor; the brakes creaked and squealed. The car stopped suddenly.

"We have arrived!" came a voice from the driver's seat.

Three distinct taps on the floor of the car.

"All out!" rasped six voices in unison.

Twelve human feet hit the leaf-strewn ground at the same instant. All went to the rear of the car. Six black-robed men faced toward the bound one.

It was the leader's frigid monotone that rent the moment's silence:

"Unbuckle the straps that hold him to the plank! Remove the burlap! Untie his feet, but give him not the freeness of his hands!"

Five men took their places quickly, each man to his particular task. Pantzar was dragged out and stood upright. The men worked fast, and soon he was blinking in the dazzling glare of a powerful electric bulb.

Six men with coal-black beards of equal length formed in a semicircle in front of him; each dressed in black, a tight cap of the same color pulled far down over his ears.

Pantzar glanced from one to the other. His lips were for a moment paralyzed. Again, he momentarily gazed at each of the six men in turn. His small blue eyes glistened under the gray canopy of his hair; his emaciated face quivered; his purple lips parted, and he breathed long and deeply.

"The Black Temple Band!" he gasped aloud.

"You're right, for once, you old image-maker!" sneered one.

"You super-mystic!" hissed another with a fiendish smile.

"I am not the maker of the lifelike, skeleton figures," pleaded Pantzar. "Louvili is the creator."

"Ha! Ha!" sneered the leader. " 'Tis none but Pantzar's hand that shapes the images of our dead, and makes them mechanically perfect, that this degraded Louvili may use them for his designing purposes—a disgrace."

A sardonic hiss went round the semicircle.

Pantzar's deep-sunken, blue eyes snapped, his wan face grew tense, and the straight-cut, livid lips parted.

"Then you, that you do accuse me, must be the husband of the leather dealer's wife," he asserted, firmly. " 'Twas your burlap that—"

A heavy hand clapped quickly over the speaker's mouth, and a deep voice sounded:

"No more of this! You know one of our number, we admit. By studying deeper, your acknowledgment and the rapid succession of thoughts you pursued to arrive at this recognition prove to us that you are unquestionably the one whom we did this night seek."

"Silence!" commanded the leader. "Speak no longer thus in so densely

timbered a place." He turned to the gray-haired man.

"Guide us to Louvili's palace-cave."

"Why is it that you cannot go alone, since you have come this far unguided?"

"Parley not with questioning!" retorted the leader gruffly. "We cannot find our way in this entangled labyrinth. We know there are secret wirings here and do not care to meet our fate at the hands of such an unscrupulous wretch as you." Then in firmer tones: "Lead on, and say no more!"

Pantzar was thoughtful for some moments, his aged head bowed low.

"Do you refuse?" demanded the leader, directing the blinding glare of the light on the old man's face.

"Not I!" declared Pantzar, with quickened turn of mind. "Unbind my hands that I may be free to use my arms."

His blue eyes met the leader's black ones, squarely.

"Do this, and place in my care the electric bulb. I will show the way. Once started, you shall see all, be the end what it will."

"Shall we witness your transformation?" jeered one.

"No more such remarks!" admonished the leader. "Take the bindings from his arms!"

Soon the huge light was in Pantzar's trembling hand, and he turned down the narrow trail that penetrated the timbered valley.

"Wait here!" he said. "I will clear the way. When I call, come at once."

Pantzar proceeded a little way on the rough, rock-strewn path. He stepped to a bush and pulled at a twig. Instantly the forest darkness was glittering with countless sparkling bulbs. A few paces more and he reached into a pile of rocks.

There was a shaking of the stone pathway, similar to the movements of a grain-cleaner's screen. Suddenly the rough pathway became as smooth and even of surface as a slab of polished marble.

"Come!" cried Pantzar.

Six black-robed men dashed forward quickly, and were soon at the aged Pantzar's side.

The passage was lighter than the brightest day.

The gray-haired man bowed in reflection, then, looking up, dashed the portable lamp upon the stone.

"What you have sought," said he, in a languid monotone, "you soon shall see."

As slowly as a funeral march, Pantzar led them down the path of polished stone. Numerous lights glared brightly through the thick foliage of the overhanging branches, and giant trees, thickly set in entangling underbrush on either side, walled them in. The aged one reeled weakly from side to side as he went falteringly on, while behind him trailed the six black-robed men, all with bowed heads.

PANTZAR stopped suddenly and faced about.

"We are here!" he stated in a solemn, quivering voice.

The eyes of six black-capped men followed his directing finger. Before them was a perpendicular wall of stone, smoothly polished, and apparently without joint or crevice.

"But where is the entrance?" asked the leader, somewhat puzzled.

"'Tis here! Right here before your eyes!" declared the aged one in a cold, lifeless tone.

"Open quickly! We have no time to tarry!" commanded the leader hastily.

"Be it so," agreed Pantzar, reluctantly. "I thought you might turn back."

As his voice died out, he raised his slim, white hands heavenward and pulled at a twig above his head. A vapor encircled them, the rustling of

the leaves ceased, and an infinite stillness crept over the spot. Then moans as of unseen, suffering humans broke upon their ears.

The white-haired man, for a second time, raised his hands and touched the broken branch. Slowly, steadily, the weird sounds died away.

"Remove your robes, Black Princes of the Black Temple Band!"

He paused a moment to give them ample time. The six men did not move.

"Obey my command!" said he, with raise of voice. "Delay not! No man can enter this place dressed in black. 'Tis Louvili's steadfast rule!"

"Rules are not for us!" chimed six men in unison.

Pantzar laughed a sickening laugh.

"You do not understand the seriousness of your choice," said he. "My life, as it is now, is worthless to me—an aged man in six murderers' hands. One touch and through your six bodies, as well as the one I now enjoy, countless volts of electric current shall quickly pass. I give you time to reconsider. Shall I end it all?"

Six black robes fell instantly to the earth at the wearers' feet.

The gray-haired man gazed intently toward the perpendicular wall of stone. He pushed a knot on a gnarled tree. Inch by inch, mechanically, quietly, the wall began to open at the top and tip gradually outward. Soon, a faint ray of light showed around the edges. Once started, the moving wall kept swinging down, as if hinged at the bottom. Purple-white lights now gleamed into the black bearded faces of six statue-like men.

As the stone wall continued downward, seeking slowly the level of the smooth entrance, the gray vapor became denser. Gradually the men were separated from the outside world by myriads of glistening, dancing crystals.

When the wall rested horizontally at their feet, a mammoth cave lay open to their view. The purple light cast a ghastly glow over the spacious interior. A huge copper railing enclosed a massive table in which were hundreds of black buttons. Midway, across the cave from right to left, hung heavy drapes of gold and silver cloth. From the stone dome was suspended a giant hand-carved globe of countless facets, which divided the gleam of the powerful arc light into threadlike rays of violet and green and yellow hues.

The once lowering wall now formed an entrance slab, mirroring the brilliancy of the richly carved cave.

Pantzar stepped forward and, pausing in the entrance, faced the eager band.

"Do you wish to see more," he asked, "or will you leave me and return to the place from which you came?"

"We'll see all, and see your finish, too," declared the leader dryly.

Pantzar smiled a deathlike smile.

"Then, be it so! Enter, Black Princes of the Black Temple Band! Walk steadily in single file and touch not a single thing, for all within these walls are current-bearing devices of Louvili's master hand."

Six men bowed acknowledgment of the aged one's command.

Pantzar turned mechanically and faced within. With timed, cat-like tread, he entered. One by one, the six black-capped men fell into line and followed to the portals.

With a wave of his bony arm, the aged Pantzar motioned them to form in single line about the outside of the polished copper railing.

Quickly, he stepped to the large, polished table with its numerous buttons. He touched one of the black beads upon its surface. The massive entrance closed with the same mechanical precision as it had opened.

"Enough of this!" cried one. "Where are the figures? They are what we want to see! Whom are you imitating now?"

Again, the aged man laughed coldly.

"Be quick!" commanded the leader, taking a step forward but avoiding the rail in front of him.

The long, tapering fingers of the aged man touched another button, another, and still another. One by one, little by little, the gold and silver drapes folded back, exposing the remainder of the cave.

Neatly arranged in a semicircle about a moss-covered, stagnant pool, were wan, ivory-complexioned, human-like heads, set upon thinly-robed waxen forms. Glistening, half-closed eyes peered down upon the murky waters in a stony, deathlike stare.

Again, the withered fingers passed over the responding buttons. Steadily, languidly, simultaneously, a slim right arm of each of the mechanical figures raised.

Pantzar chuckled weakly, and his fingers pressed quickly upon others of the black buttons.

The mechanical lips of the waxen heads parted. Beating time, the draped arms moved up and down.

Pantzar's small blue eyes turned wearily to each of the six men in turn.

All save the leader's caught his glance. He dashed around the circumference of the cave toward a waxen figure still incomplete.

The white-haired man's fingers touched other buttons quickly, and the figures ceased to move. His conciliatory smile was gone. His nervous face twitched in agony. He lunged forward and in an instant was in pursuit of the leader.

The leader reached the partly finished image, with Pantzar close behind. He jerked aside a sheet. In the semi-darkened section before him lay the likeness of an incomplete human form—a counterpart in the clay.

"Wretch!" the leader cried. "You shall this night die! Come, men! Dash him into this green pool and hold his head submerged until he shall breathe no more."

Pantzar attempted to return to the table that he might extinguish the light, but six men held him fast and moved him toward the pool.

Suddenly the leader drew back from the rest.

"Hold, men!" said he thoughtfully, "Let Pantzar witness the wrecking of his fortune."

"Do not ruin my life's work," cried the white-haired man in despair. "Please grant that I may exhibit it to an art-admiring world. Let me show that Louvili's teaching has made of me a super-master at the trade. Numerous patents are now pending. This wealth will I divide. Grant me my time that—"

"Patents, bah! Life, three times bah!" hissed the leader. "One hold the guilty wretch! Others to the waxen forms. Spare not one."

Quickly, five men dashed forward toward the silent likenesses of life, leaving the white-haired man within the sixth one's sturdy grip.

A SHRIEK of pain echoed throughout the cave, and five men halted in their steps. The leader had touched one of the forms lightly and had received a tingling sting.

Mumbled words passed among the five men. The leader's eyes focused fiendishly upon the trembling, helpless Pantzar.

"Turn off the current!" he commanded loudly.

"To do so, I must be free to return to the table," was Pantzar's quick reply.

"You may," said the leader, "but we will accompany you. Touch also the button that opens the heavy door.

Hurriedly they seized him and, carefully avoiding the encircling pol-

ished copper railing, they rushed him to the button-covered slab.

Quietly, the heavy door swung down. His fingers moved slowly, as if in agony. Momentarily, his hands rested on the buttons, his head raised, and the pallid lips parted.

"'Tis done," he gasped, his tear-filled eyes raising to meet the black eyes of the leader of the gang. "Save the images," he pleaded. "Save the images, for they are masterpieces of a master art. Louvili has gone to barter them for a fortune, and still I hesitate to transfer ownership. For fifty years have I toiled unceasingly upon them. Save them, I beg, even though I shall not live to see the light of day. Consider, men, should you in a fit of hate destroy the work it has taken a lifetime to perfect?"

Each bearded man stepped back, and each again studied the figures near the pool. Whispers went from ear to ear. The leader moved apart from the rest, and addressed the aged Pantzar:

"We grant you the request you make."

His voice was low. Each word was slowly, clearly enunciated.

"Your images shall be spared, for we shall load them in the truck. They shall be sold! 'Twill pay us for our trip."

"And me?" interrupted Pantzar, with bowed head.

"You have seen, for a last time, the summer's rising sun," declared the leader frigidly.

Turning to the men, the leader waved them round the railing.

"Go about your work, and parley not!" he ordered. "We will reap the reward of this miser's clandestine life."

One by one, the images were carried through the opening and down the narrow, stony path, and carefully placed in the car. Tears coursed down the withered cheeks of the watchful, white-haired man as the last one passed from view.

The leader seized him by the arm and started toward the pool.

Pantzar drew back.

The leader called to his men, and instantly they were at his side. Picking up the aged man, they carried him and stood him near the water's edge.

"Tear his garments into shreds!" commanded the leader gruffly. "Tie them round about his worthless frame so that neither hands nor feet can move. This done, we shall hold him below the surface of this greenish pool." His voice sank to a deep, acrimonious bass. "And let—him—die!"

Between parted lips, the aged Pantzar clenched his pearly teeth, and struggled in their grasp. Pushing backward and then forward, he moved the men close to the shining copper rail. Suddenly, he dropped upon his hands and knees and crawled. They pounced upon him, but their fingers slipped their hold. Try as they would, his shoulders passed under the railing, inch by inch.

"Rip the garments!" ordered the leader hoarsely. "We'll bind him when he stops!"

Under the polished copper railing, the struggling Pantzar crept. To stop him, two men unthinkingly braced against the current-carrying rail. A painful groan. Pantzar moved on untouched. Six pairs of eyes rolled painfully heavenward, and six men dropped, a quivering, lifeless mass.

WHEN the morning sun crept up the cloudless eastern sky, the weary Pantzar, with a wan, solemn, yet purposeful face, slowly guided the laden car down the city's quiet thoroughfare. The door to the well-hidden cave had been securely closed, never to swing again; the electric wirings had been stripped from the forest-furnished hangings; and what was dearer to the aged Pantzar than life itself, his works, had been saved to keep him company.

HIS FAMILY

by C. Franklin Miller

Author of "The Ghost of Silent Smith," etc.

THE elemental love of a man for his family will take queer turns at times, but for sheer horror none of the famous tragedies of history can equal the warped affection which forms the basis of the incident I am about to narrate. It happened in the heart of that vast uninhabited country drained by the upper Congo, some two hundred miles from civilization's nearest outpost.

As a member of the Denckla geographic expedition, I had spent nearly a year in the wild interior, collecting a mass of scientific data for the society we represented. While the task at hand had been a fascinating one, I could feel myself growing dull and sluggish, mentally as well as physically, under the devitalizing rays of the African sun.

My note-book recalls the date as June 14, 1890, when we emerged from the swamp-infested inland, and again set eyes on the sullen waters of the dominating Congo. The sight was a welcome one. To us it meant but a five days' journey to the comfort and contentment of a white man's home.

We pitched our tents on the angle of land formed by a tiny rivulet and the growing expanse of the master stream. The sun had dipped far down behind the towering trees to the west by the time our camp chores were completed, and the comparative coolness of early evening had sprung up.

Wearied by the arduous tasks of the day, I indulged in a leisurely pipe and prepared to retire immediately. Upon entering my tent I discovered, with wondering eyes, a long, gaping rent in the canvas opposite—clean-cut and new. From outside there sounded the soft thud of flying feet. I plunged through the opening in time to see a dim figure disappear into the tangled undergrowth of the darkening jungle.

Investigation developed that a rifle, several boxes of cartridges and two scientific books, which we carried for reference, were missing. Apparently nothing else had been tampered with.

A guard was mounted on the encampment that night, but the mysterious marauder never returned.

Stretched out on my cot, I pondered over the puzzling occurrence for some time. That the theft had been perpetrated by a white man, I knew. The form which had scurried into the leafy cover of the jungle was not that of a dark-skinned native. This was a riddle in itself, for the men who penetrate any distance into the wilds of

the world are men of purpose who find no time for petty thievery. But the nature of the loot was as much of a wonder as the race of the man. Apparently no food had been sought; and why the books? Why—the—books? I could frame no satisfactory answer and fell asleep presently with that query weaving monotonously through my brain.

HIGH noon of our third day in that locality found me some distance inland on a little hunting excursion of my own. I had about decided to retrace my steps back to camp when I brought up suddenly in astonishment. That this section of the dark continent should harbor any civilized inhabitants was beyond belief, but away to my left, cunningly hidden behind the dense foliage of the matted trees, stood a cabin.

There was no sign of human life about the place, not even the semblance of a pathway; but the very existence of a permanent, man-made shack so far removed from any settlement was mystery enough to stir the blood of any adventurous soul. I started forward slowly with the vague idea of unearthing some strange jungle secret and emerged presently upon a little clearing, from where I surveyed the place with doubtful eyes.

Few tools and very little skill had been utilized in the erection of that cabin. There were no windows; the wall logs were undaubed and irregular, some of them jutting far out at the corners, while the ill-fitting door sagging pathetically upon rope hinges gave to the whole a grotesque appearance.

But it was not so much the appearance of the place as the intangible atmosphere of horror enveloping it which held me. Instinctively I distrusted that abandoned silence which seemed to beckon so innocently. Some brooding evil lay hidden there waiting with cunning patience for the springing of a trap; but like the venturesome fool I was, I approached and laid my weight cautiously against the door. To my surprize it resisted, and for a moment I speculated as to the wisdom of indulging my curiosity any further. That barred door indicated the presence of some one. Even as I hesitated a man's soft-drawling voice sounded from within, holding me rigid with amazement.

"Ah'll paddle down to the settlement next week, honey, and see if Ah can't pick up some new books for you. Reckon daughter can attend you satisfactorily until Ah return. Now try to sleep," soothingly. "You'll feel better in a little while."

Women—living in this God-forsaken spot! And a man of breeding, if I were any judge! The whole thing was preposterous, but such was the evidence my ears had gathered.

Thinking that I could possibly be of some service in case of illness, I raised the butt-end of my rifle and rapped. A deep silence followed. For a moment I experienced that unpleasant sensation of being passed upon by hidden eyes, and then the door was slowly opened.

Involuntarily I recoiled a step, scarcely knowing what to expect. A tall, broad-shouldered man appeared. There was in his carriage a certain flash of dignity which could not be concealed by the tattered garments he wore. His hair was gray and fell in wild disorder to his shoulders, framing a countenance seamed by years of suffering. For a moment he regarded me with deep-set, weary eyes. Then:—

"You are welcome, sah," he said quietly, in the same soft-toned drawl, and stood aside for me to enter. I did so, feeling vaguely that the whole occurrence was a fragment of some senseless dream.

The interior was fitfully illumined by the daylight which filtered in between the undaubed logs, revealing a

picture of strange barrenness. Except for a few sawed-off logs evidently serving as chairs, and a large upturned box in the center, the room was bare of furnishings. Across one end of the structure was draped a long, black cloth, which no doubt concealed the women.

My strange host closed the door without barring it and when I turned I found his eyes searching me with an unfathomable expression which was decidedly unpleasant.

"You'll pardon my intrusion," I said, a bit awkwardly. "I spied your cabin on my way back to camp and thought I could be of some service My name is Brent."

"Glad to meet you, suh," he answered. "Visitors are a rare luxury with us. Mah name is Warner—Colonel Warner of Kentucky."

There was a surprizing power in his hand-clasp.

"Unfortunately the women are somewhat indisposed at present, but Ah'll tell them you called, Mr. Brent. Won't you be seated, suh?"

I sank down upon the nearest log, a highly perplexed man. The formality of it all would have been laughable were it not for the serious dignity of this surprizing colonel. So far as he was concerned we might have met in the drawing-room of some Southern mansion. As for myself, I could not throw off the sense of tragedy which seemed to lurk beneath the surface. Visibly there was nothing to fear, but the events of the last few minutes were too unnatural to put me at ease.

Of a sudden my roving eyes settled on the familiar outlines of a pair of shabby-looking books resting on the box close by. I stared, and the colonel, evidently noticing my gaze, took up one of the volumes.

"An excellent discourse, suh," said he, proffering me the volume, "but highly technical. Have you ever read it?"

I thumbed the well-known cover. On the fly-leaf, in my own handwriting, appeared my scrawly signature: "James W. Brent."

"One of the best treatises on the subject in existence," I declared.

"Decidedly! Ah got it only a few days ago for Mrs. Warner. She loves books, but finds reading a hardship. Her sight is dim. So Ah read things aloud to her. We found that very interesting, suh!"

With a sigh, which was half moan, he subsided upon a log near the opposite wall, and I returned the book to its companion. Undoubtedly it was my own, but I found it difficult to believe that this well-bred gentleman, however peculiar, had committed the theft.

I gazed at him curiously and found him staring vacantly into space with sagging jaw. Finally he spoke in a queer, detached manner.

"Colonel Warner! It seems like ages since I've heard that name. . . . The mad colonel! That's what they call me." Then suddenly: "Have you ever heard them tell of the mad colonel?"

I had not.

"No matter!" And he waved his hand in dismission of the thought. "You would not feel so secure in my presence with their wild tales running through your brain . . . . Ah am not mad!" In his tone was a shade of wonder. "Only the victim of a terrible vengeance. . . . Do you see those pictures, Mr. Brent?"

I had overlooked them before—two small photographs framed in black hanging on the wall behind me; one of an elderly lady, beautiful beyond a doubt, the other of a captivating youngster.

"My family, Mr. Brent!"

His eyes fairly glowed with the pleasure of the telling, but promptly recovered their weary expression.

"We were happy once—back in Kentucky. A rich family, and well-

known. But disaster overtook us in the shape of a hopeless maniac—Andrew Lang."

For a moment he was silent, staring down at the floor with bent head, his gray hair falling about his face. I glanced around, trying to conjure up some excuse for leaving. I had no desire to probe into his family secrets; besides, that tense atmosphere of horror that overhung the place was anything but reassuring. I wanted to be gone. Rather the wild things of the jungle than to be cooped up with—what? I did not know. But I could sense some hidden terror, and involuntarily my eyes wandered to that crape-like drapery which divided the cabin.

I started to speak, but his soft voice interrupted, ignoring me completely.

"Ah was telling you of Andrew Lang, the madman. Ah trusted him like a brother and thought he was grateful until Ah discovered his perfidy. Lies and soft-tongued entreaties were his stock in trade. It was Mrs. Warner he wanted, suh. Cunning indeed were his methods . . . . Ah—killed him!"

I could scarcely repress a shudder. The whole thing was beginning to get on my nerves; but I could not stay his soft-toned drawl.

"Insanity had been the family blight of Andrew Lang. All four of his sons were afflicted. For years they hounded me from place to place, vowing to avenge their father's death with cruel torture. But I felt justified. The honor of the Warner name—my wife's happiness—my little Helen . . . ."

His voice trembled. Tears started to his eyes. Then he drew himself erect with military dignity.

"Legally Ah was a murderer, suh, and the law would not protect me from those four warped brains. I fled the country with my little family and took refuge here in the heart of the jungle, where I thought I would be safe; but those cunning brains found me—at last."

His shoulders drooped and his form relaxed into the very picture of despair. When he again spoke, his voice was dull, expressionless.

"First one came—and then another, disguised; but Ah knew them . . . . And in self-defense Ah—killed them!"

For a moment I thought the man was mad. His tale was fantastic enough. But one look at his forlorn figure seemed to reassure me; sorrow and suffering were all that the picture held.

I WAS about to utter some words of sympathy when the door of the shack flew open and a harsh voice intruded. I started erect with quickened pulse. Framed in the door-way was a man clad in the khaki of the border rangers. One hand was poised lightly on the automatic in his belt. His eyes burned with triumph as they rested on the bent figure of the colonel, who had scarcely moved.

"So we've got you at last," grimly.

"At last," echoed the colonel, dully.

"And a hell of a chase it was. Two others were not so successful. You have no idea what happened to them?"

It was more of an accusation than a question.

"Ah killed them—as Ah will you," was the colonel's toneless reply.

"Why, damn your mad hide," exploded the stranger, wrathfully, "I'll—"

"Mad? Mad?"

The colonel was on his feet with wildly glaring eyes, his hands working spasmodically.

"You—call me—mad!"

Suddenly he leaped forward and one powerful arm shot out. Recoiling a step the stranger whipped out his automatic. Simultaneously I brought the butt of my rifle down on his arm. Something cracked; a low moan escaped his lips and his weapon clattered to the floor.

Then the colonel was upon him, his powerful hands clutched in a death grip on the stranger's throat. I tried to pull him off. It was useless. The stranger's face turned purple and his body sagged. Then the colonel's rage subsided and with a hissing intake of breath he let his victim slip through his hands into a lifeless heap on the floor.

A sickening nausea swept me at the hideous sight. I shuddered and turned away. The colonel seized my hand in his and I could feel him tremble.

"Thank you, suh," he whispered. "God knows what would have become of my family. . . . He was the—third!"

His voice faltered and my heart went out to him in pity in spite of the murder just committed. Then with a sudden movement he turned and bent over the dead body of his enemy.

Grasping the limp form beneath the arm-pits he started to drag it across the rough boards of the cabin and presently disappeared behind that mysterious barrier of black without a backward glance. A gruesome object to lay before the eyes of that unseen family of his!

I studied that swaying curtain with puzzled eyes, trying to penetrate its secret, and gradually grew conscious of a thin stream of red slowly oozing from beneath its low-hanging folds. I stared, motionless, my brain beset with wild imaginings. Surely that slowly creeping line of red was—blood! What thing of evil had I stumbled upon? What horror did that sable cloth conceal?

I tiptoed across the floor and gently pulled back the curtain at one side. A weird sight met my eyes.

The colonel was kneeling before an upturned box, his body bent like a worshiper before a shrine. Beside him where he knelt, rested three shaggy, human heads, one still wet with blood, while a decapitated form in blood-stained khaki lay huddled in a far corner. I heard the colonel speak—a horribly elated whisper.

"You're safe, honey! He'll never get you. He can't. We'll fool them all—all!"

And he laughed.

I stared with something akin to fascination at the repulsive sight. Suddenly he turned, sensing my presence.

"Come in, suh," he cried. "Come in and meet the family—Mrs. Warner and little Helen!"

I saw that his eyes were bulging and his face working in a frenzy of maniacal emotion. With a cat-like movement he sprang to his feet, disclosing the idols of his worship—his family—resting sphinx-like on the box before him. Two empty, grinning skulls!

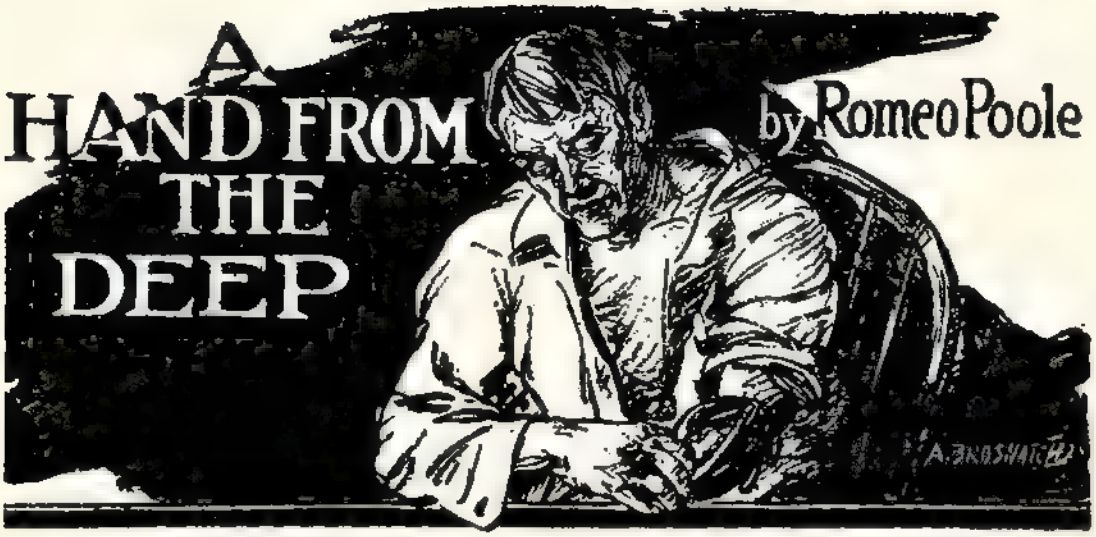
A terrible weakness assailed me as I staggered away from that place of madness into the sanity of broad daylight.

FIVE days later, on arriving at the settlement down-stream, I learned that three rangers had been sent out after "the mad colonel" somewhere up the river and that none had returned.

I held my peace.

A HAND FROM THE DEEP

by Romeo Poole



SOMEWHERE near midnight my room telephone rang, and according to well-formed habit I rolled out of bed and answered almost before I was fully awake.

"Ambulance trip for you, Marsh—Whitby Home."

That brought me wide awake, and hustling into trousers, shoes, shirt and white uniform coat I descended to the main office. Dr. Lang, the superintendent, met me at the foot of the stairs with a heavy overcoat.

"Here," he said, "put this on—it's a pretty chilly night. Here's your bandage kit; you may need it. Ambulance in the back drive. Explosion and fire out at the Whitby Home. Send back for help if necessary. Now use some speed."

I used some speed, and when I got into the ambulance the driver used some more. We tore up the street at a hazardous rate, the chauffeur giving himself over to the task of driving, while I turned the crank that ran the shrieking signal horn.

The so-called Whitby Home was an obscure little institution occupying a shabby ten-room brick building in a low-class residence district in the outskirts of the city. The place bore a rather evil reputation, and it was hinted that its owner and operator, Dr. Whitby, was guilty of various illegal practises in connection with his hospital work. However, no complaint of any importance had ever been lodged against him, and consequently no investigation of his activities had ever taken place and the general opinion of his character remained unconfirmed.

For aught I knew, the rumors about Whitby might have been born of the natural resentment of all medical men toward a practitioner who declines to be governed by their standards and becomes, therefore, a "quack." For Whitby had belonged to no medical society; he was careless about collecting anything for his work; and he practised any kind of medical theory, old or new, that happened to appeal to him, totally disregarding the ethics of the profession. He had no general practise, and the inmates of his would-be sanitarium were usually people of little learning and nearly always the victims of disabling accidents. I must mention, however, that my gratification at the thought of investigating the Whitby Home and some of its curious inmates entirely overcame my resentment at losing most of a night's sleep.

In a matter of seconds we drew up as near the place as we could get, the fire department having the narrow street blocked. The building was almost completely gutted by the fire when we arrived, and, grabbing my first-aid kit, I ran up to the captain who was directing the fire-fighting to inquire about the victims.

"Only one alive," he panted. "Rest all killed in the explosion. Come over here."

The survivor, whose room had been on the ground floor, had not been injured by the accident, although he had been stunned temporarily by the shock of the explosion. The firemen had wrapped him in a blanket salvaged from the burning house and laid him in a sheltered place to await the ambulance. Passing the mangled bodies of the dead, we found him sitting up, looking a little dazed at the excitement, but feeling cheerful and apparently comfortable. He was a common-looking little man of probably thirty years, a laborer of not very extensive intellect, but alert and sensible in answering our questions. He had been staying at the place on account of the amputation of his left arm a little above the elbow. I sat by his side on the return to the hospital, and questioned him regarding the cause of the fire.

"Gas or gasoline explosion, I guess," he responded readily. "Fox, the fellow that did the odd work around the house, was in my room along about 10 o'clock, and sat there and talked to me a while. Finally he said he smelt something like gasoline or escaping gas, that seemed to come down the stairs, and he went up to see to it. After a while I heard him open the door at the top of the stairway, and that's about all I knew till I come to, out there in the yard. Something must've blown the whole top of the house to pieces. I was lucky, for I was the only one that slept downstairs. Are any of the rest of 'em—alive?"

No, not a soul, I told him. The patient's face betrayed genuine regret at this.

"Too bad. Doc Whitby was a good fellow. I got this arm cut off in a smash-up over at the barrel-stave mill, and Doc Whitby just happened along before I even got it wrapped up, and he took me in and took care of it ever since, and never asked for a dollar. I had a coupla weeks wages with me, and I turned that over to him, but he didn't seem very anxious to get it. Wanted me to wait and see what a nice job he'd do on that arm—some new scheme he had."

ARRIVING at the hospital I installed my patient in a ward bed, made out his record card in the name he gave me, Simon Glaze, and then proceeded to look after the dressing on his arm, which I found soaking wet. I removed this and applied iodoform gauze, dry, covering it with a linen bandage.

"Aren't you going to soak it up?" he asked.

"Soak it? No. That's no way to take care of a stump."

"Doc Whitby kept it wet all the time."

"It's a new one to me," I told him. "We always keep wounds like that clean and dry. You'll be all right with this dressing."

"Well, maybe," he said doubtfully, as I left him.

The next morning I went in for a look at my patient, who appeared to have spent a rather bad night.

"Doc," he began, eagerly, "couldn't you stretch a point and wet this bandage for me? I haven't slept a wink all night with that dry rag on it."

I wondered what kind of faith cure Whitby had been practising on Glaze, and I maintained my position that the wet bandage was not the proper treatment. Glaze stared at me with red,

sleepless eyes, misery showing in every line of his face.

"Doc," he finally said, "I want to talk to the regular top boss of this concern, and I want him pretty soon."

We had considerable argument over this, but ultimately I went and brought up Dr. Lang in compliance with Glaze's request. Glaze had been lying face down on his bed during my absence, and when Dr. Lang and I returned we opened the felted door with its silent latch without a particle of noise and had stepped into the room before Glaze was aware of our approach. Dr. Lang started to speak and his heavy voice broke on the stillness of the room with quite a jar. The effect on the patient was most startling. He gathered his legs and his good arm under him like a flash and sprang backward, clear on to the next bed, which, fortunately for its occupant, was empty at the time, the patient being in the dressing room.

Lang gasped.

"Aha, a mental case, as I might have suspected."

He crossed quickly to where the patient lay, still crouched in the same posture, speechless, doubled up. The doctor laid a hand on him, spoke to him, turned him over on his back, all without evoking a word from Glaze, who lay with eyes half-closed like a man playing dead.

"Well, let's have a look at the arm, anyhow," said Lang, and he proceeded to uncover the unresisting man's stump.

"Bad-looking job," he commented. "No infection, but just doesn't look right. I suppose Whitby was trying some wildcat scheme on him, and so long as he has no infection maybe we'd better continue it for a while just to keep him calmed down. Then we'll gradually break in on some reliable modern treatment. Didn't you say he was perfectly rational last night?"

"He certainly was."

"Next time he has a lucid interval, just call me, will you, Marsh? No matter what I'm doing. This is an interesting case, and I'd like to know what the late Whitby has been doing to him."

Some time later in the day Glaze recovered his poise, and Dr. Lang talked to him at length, questioning him about the treatment administered by Dr. Whitby, but the answers only increased our curiosity. Glaze admitted that he had been under chloroform a number of times since Whitby had first cared for his arm stump, which seemed rather unusual to us. Questioned as to the purpose of this, he said he didn't believe the arm had ever been touched when he was under the anesthetic, as it was never sore afterwards. There was an injury in the roof of his mouth that bled a good deal, he said, and there were little sore spots on his back that were quite painful for a day or two.

"And then," he finished, "there was a good deal of time I can't remember at all. Guess I been kinda feverish or something, for there's long stretches of time go by that I can't remember anything. This morning was one of 'em.

"And, say, Doctor, I wonder if you could fix it so I can have a bath pretty often—say every day, or twice a day. I don't want much hot water—just plain cold is good enough for me. Doc Whitby always let me bathe two or three times a day, and I just can't seem to get enough of it."

Dr. Lang was interested enough to assent to this, although he hardly expected to collect a cent from the patient. He was retaining Glaze for the satisfaction of his private curiosity.

"That's the weirdest case I ever saw or heard of," said Dr. Lang to me later. "Call it intermittent insanity if you want to, but he hasn't a trace of fever, nor a sign of locomotor ataxia, both of which lunatics practically always have. In fact,

when he is in those silent fits his temperature is actually *below normal.* And how he takes to water! Whatever is wrong with him, it isn't hydrophobia."

I prepared Glaze's bath for him several times, and he demanded water that was practically unheated, although the time was early winter and the temperature outside well below freezing.

Glaze was removed to a room by himself, with a bath attached, where his eccentricities would bother no one else, and during the next two weeks he showed very little change in symptoms. I was careful not to startle him unduly, but even under the most careful treatment he still showed that curious inclination to double up into a ball and go backward—always backward—away from any one who approached him. His talkative intervals grew shorter, and if allowed he would spend hours in his tub of cold water, hardly moving a muscle.

MAKING an examination of the arm-stump one morning I noted for the first time three or four little warty growths in the suture where the skin had been drawn together over the stump. As the patient was feeling apparently normal at the time, I held a hand mirror up to the stump so that he could see the warts, too, and told him they would probably have to be cut off. He looked intently at the reflection of the end of the stump for a few seconds and then turned to me with a startled expression in his face and voice.

"Don't cut 'em off," he pleaded, and on the instant he doubled up again into a ball, rolling on the floor of the dressing-room like a wooden thing.

When I told Dr. Lang of the incident his curiosity at Glaze's behavior put a severe strain on the good doctor's self-control.

"If that man Whitby were alive today," he remarked with studied restraint, "I'd be inclined to put him on the operating table and persuade the truth out of him with a red-hot iron. It's some devilish work of his that makes a man act like a dried armadillo every time any one looks at him. And that subnormal temperature? Where does he get it?"

Two days later we took the somewhat unwilling Glaze into the operating room to care for his unhealthy stump. Dr. Lang of course superintended the work, and the actual cutting had been turned over to my fellow-interne, a young Irishman named Lancey with a flaming red head and a likable manner, whom every one considered to be destined for a brilliant future. As I gradually whiffed the ether into the patient's nostrils Lancey was busy unwrapping the stump. When the cut-off member was exposed, Lancey's eyes rested for only a second on the bits of flesh he was expected to remove; than his whole face changed as if he had been struck with a club.

"Holy cats!" he gasped, his lips turning gray-white. "Cut out the ether, Marsh. I don't want to operate on *that.*"

I stopped and turned toward Dr. Lang, who was a little nonplussed at Lancey's sudden refusal to carry out his commission.

"Pardon my abruptness, Doctor," apologized Lancey to his superior, "but I'd like to have six or seven days' time before going ahead with this cutting."

"*You'd* like it?"

"Yes, Doctor. If you'll give me a week before you disturb this man's arm I think I can tell you something about the honorable Dr. Whitby's work that'll make your eyes open. But I've just got to have that much time."

"One week," ruminated the superintendent, slowly, "won't kill nor cure him, in his present condition. I presume we can wait that long. But aren't you forgetting that I am in

charge here, and that this man is being kept here solely on my responsibility? Do you have to be so extremely reticent with your theories? I feel that I'm entitled to know something about what you think you've discovered."

"I know what Whitby has done," said Lancey simply. "And in a week I can tell you what he did it with. Can I have that much time?"

"Yes, take your week," exploded the doctor, with some irritation. "But I'm holding you strictly responsible for the condition of this patient."

"That's all right—that's what I want."

"And I still think you might give me an idea of what you're talking about."

"Take a look at that, then," pointing to the bared stump.

Dr. Lang scrutinized the growths. As he had not recently been reading on the subject that had given Lancey his sudden inspiration, it is possible that he did not see anything definite on Glaze's arm; also it is possible that in his dignified conservatism he doubted even his own eyesight. But as he retreated, dissatisfied and silent, I bent close and looked. What I saw took my breath away and made me wonder if I were really awake. Lancey hurried away, and I trundled the unconscious Glaze back to his bed.

DURING the next two days Glaze lost nearly all that was left of his normal human instincts and speech. He moved and obeyed mechanically when spoken to but seemed to understand motion better than speech, so that it was often necessary for me to point to a thing in order to make him comprehend what I wanted. His mania for the cold bath increased, and if I went into his room quietly in the early morning I frequently found him doubled into the familiar ball, sleeping with his eyes half open.

Observing Glaze's eyes so much brought out another revelation. Upon first seeing the man I had noticed his bright, intelligent-looking eyes, which were rather prominent; but now, since his recent prolonged lapses into semi-consciousness, I noticed that his eyes were sunk deeper into his head and seemed to be losing their luster. Now, this condition might be induced by anemia or something of the sort but Glaze was in the pink of physical condition and not in the least emaciated, and I was at a loss to explain the change in his eyes. He had certainly grown less talkative at the same time, and vaguely I wondered if something were influencing a part of his brain causing it to shrink and thus by natural consequence causing his eyes to sink farther back in the bony structure. As I sat observing him it suddenly struck me that the crown of his head seemed to be less prominent than when I first saw him, and after a careful survey I was positive that the man's head was losing its prominent crown and sinking into a more brutish line.

Of course any physician knows that a man's skull can change shape in the course of time, if something happens to develop a new portion of his brain, just as the bones in a coal-heaver's shoulders bend under his heavy loads; but a change like that in one's skull would hardly be perceptible in less than two or three years, and the apparent alteration in the shape of Glaze's skull in the three weeks we had known him seemed like a preposterous dream of some kind. Not wishing further to upset my good superior, Dr. Lang, I kept still about this weird discovery until Lancey returned to the hospital that evening, he having been out by special permission all day. Late that night I brought Lancey up and told him about the patient's eyes and asked him what he could see in the shape of his head. While Glaze lay in his habitual stupor, Lancey felt

of his head and turned it right and left. Then he placed his hands behind him and said:

"It all fits together—perfectly. But, my God, where will it end?"

I could only stare at my friend.

"I've got it, Marsh, I've got the whole story—up to date. And I don't know but that it would be a kind deed to chloroform this poor wretch and let him out of it. I never dreamed it would work so fast. Tomorrow, Marsh, I'll tell all of you what I have found out."

And Lancey went back to the laboratory.

I now studied Glaze's habits more closely than ever, for I did want to get some idea about the mysterious case before Lancey had to tell me every detail as if I were a child. Glaze was not inactive all the time. He varied between his rolled-up playing-dead attitude and sudden snappy, erratic movements. He was beginning to snap at his food and devour it hastily, almost without chewing, and this habit caused him some little stomachic disturbance, as of course it would with anybody. In his frequent visits to the bath-tub he would dive for long periods beneath the surface of the water and come up half-strangled, yet seeming to enjoy it all. And if anything surprized or startled him it was always backward that he retreated from it—backward and suddenly.

Finding time to visit Glaze along in the afternoon, I dropped into his room and found him sitting up in his chair, apparently his old, cheerful self. I spoke to him gently and without startling him, and he smiled and looked as if he would like to reply, but simply could not. Hoping to draw him out into one more conversation, I sat down beside him and continued talking to him about little things around the house with which he was familiar. Finally, unsuccessful in getting Glaze to talk, I playfully shook hands with him, preparing to leave. The hand that gripped mine nearly broke three of my fingers, and the smile left Glaze's face as he shut down on me with a grip of inhuman strength. Tugging at his hand with my own left, in an effort to free my sadly pinched right member, I saw that his thumb reached clear across my own very large palm and had almost an inch to spare. How could I have escaped noticing that huge thumb before? Then I saw the nail. It bore a sharp ridge, like the gable roof of a house, down its center, and it occupied the entire end joint of that monstrous thumb. This certainly had not been the case when I had held Glaze's right hand a few days previously while administering chloroform to him. When I finally extricated my right hand Glaze kept opening and shutting that huge pincer with a motion that reminded me of the jaws of a hungry alligator.

What was this superhuman influence that caused a man's firmest tissues to alter their shape completely within a few hours? And what was it that that ghastly, gripping claw resembled?

I left the room with cold chills running up my spine.

THE next morning Lancey arranged to explain to Dr. Lang, two or three other doctors who had become interested, and myself, regarding his findings about the mysterious patient, for which purpose they gathered in Dr. Lang's back office at 10:30 o'clock.

You may be assured that it was a highly interested little group that gathered in that room considerably before 10:30, Dr. Lang himself being almost rabidly impatient.

"Well, shoot, Lancey," he said, before the door had closed behind the last man. And Lancey shot.

"There's just one man in the room, I think, who saw and understood what

was growing on the end of our patient's arm a week ago today. At that time it was four perfectly good little fingers and a model thumb!"

This statement was greeted with voiceless gasps.

"It's something different now—in fact I hardly know what to call it in its present form, but we'll go up and look at it presently. Anyhow it is now perfectly plain that what Whitby tried to do, and partially succeeded in doing, was to modify the regenerative processes in his patient so that a new forearm would grow in place of the lost one.

"The theory is nothing very new. As early as 1906 it was observed that when a limb is amputated at the middle of a bone, the bone starts to grow out again, but increases only about one-fiftieth of an inch in length before it is halted by some other influence. You know also, of course, about the little warts of so-called "proud flesh" that apparently try to replace the original muscular tissue in case of injuries, but which are misshapen or misplaced. What Whitby was trying to get at, as I see it, was to so control these misdirected efforts of nature as to produce a new and perfect limb.

"The human body is already able to repair damaged bones by rebuilding small particles of the bony tissue; it is also able to replace muscle, nerve and even finger-nail tissue, although in somewhat imperfect forms. Whitby was trying to induce it to build a lost member in perfect form.

"Seeking this result, his studies naturally took him to observing the water animals that have this power of regeneration. A crab, for instance, when it gets a limb broken, promptly bites off the rest of the limb, and a new one grows in its place. The same is true of the lobster family, down to the tiny crawdad, no larger than a cricket. Specimens of these little creatures are frequently found with one limb far smaller than the others as a result of such occurrences.

"It seems that Whitby has been experimenting for years with the ductless and other glands of shellfish in pursuance of this theory of regeneration, and we have upstairs the living proof that he was able to prepare a glandular extract that changes the bodily cell-structure as well as influencing the building-up processes of nature; but it appears that he never succeeded in isolating the one influence from the other, both being present in his preparation.

"I have found that Whitby bought the little crawdads, which are really dwarf lobsters, from children around his neighborhood, and that his purchases ran into tens of thousands of these little creatures, and I also find that he bought live lobsters in a quantity that his dining table would never have warranted.

"In short, this patient, Simon Glaze, has had his body so saturated with the glandular extracts from lobsters that he has actually developed regenerative powers, and the bits of proud flesh on his arm-stump which you saw only a week ago became quite well-developed fingers. At that time, of course, they were getting natural human material for their reconstruction. All that has changed now, and as a result of the other influence of his medication he is now coming more and more every day to resemble a gigantic shellfish, in both body and mind—if a shellfish can be credited with a mind.

"You remember what he told about a wound in the top of his mouth? That was the easiest access to the region of his pituitary gland, a seat of powerful influence over any structural change in the man's body. Other injections were administered along his spinal column, and I firmly believe that Whitby was successful in providing the man with something that he has used since Whitby's death

in promoting the change, not understanding the real results."

I objected a moment, to state that Glaze had positively had possession of nothing he had brought from the Whitby home.

At that Dr. Lang leaped to his feet, suppressing an oath.

"I've got it!" he ejaculated, his steel-blue eyes snapping. "This infernal lunatic Whitby was afraid somebody would take his patient away from him before he got through his nice little experiments. So he just lodged bodies of oil-soluble extracts along his spinal column where they would continue to be picked up in the lymph. In this way he has gone on poisoning and wrecking this poor wretch of a laborer after he himself is dead and in—wherever such people belong! We'll go up now and have an X-ray made and see if anything can be done."

The unfinished lecture broke up and Lancey, Lang and I went up to Glaze's room immediately. As we waited for the elevator Lancey finished explaining to Dr. Lang:

"That nice little set of fingers has now turned to an almost perfect lobster claw, only two fingers of the original five having developed, both with scissorslike claws. His good right hand is today nearer a lobster claw than anything else. His speech is gone. His temperature is 93 degrees instead of a normal 98. His backward leaps when startled are the behavior of a crawfish. And the occipital bones of his head are shrinking day by day. Above all, note his fondness for water, especially on his stump. A crab could not grow a new limb except in a wet place."

We hurried into Glaze's room and on into the bathroom beyond, where he spent so much time. In the tubful of cold water we found Glaze's nude body, doubled and curled up, face far down under the water—dead.

"Poor devil," said Lancey, as we extracted the body and laid it upon the bed. "His lobster brain taught him that the only safe place for him was under water, but he lacked the lobster's breathing apparatus. Well, it's better this way, after all."

WINGS OF POWER

By LADY ANNE BONNY

Begins in the January Number of
WEIRD TALES

An absorbing, romantic novel, full of intrigues and eery mystery, woven around a startling scientific invention for subduing and controlling the human will

ON SALE EVERYWHERE DECEMBER FIRST

AFTER

By DENIS FRANCIS HANNIGAN

IT WAS the morning after my execution. I had been clumsily electrocuted. But in America such things are only too frequent. However, I cared little now for the malpractises of judges, juries, or executioners.

It was all over. I found myself waking out of a deep sleep. The first thing I saw was the face of the man whom I had murdered. It did not scowl at me. On the contrary, it smiled benevolently.

"Jack, old top, you did me a real good turn when you shot me," said Harold Ingersoll.

I had fallen madly in love with his wife, and she reciprocated my passion, for she had grown tired of the strange, detached, unworldly man she had married. Harold Ingersoll was a writer, a philosopher, a dreamer of dreams, who had inherited about ten thousand dollars from his father and a visionary's soul from his mother. While he worked hard at his legal profession, which he found only moderately profitable, his wife read Paracelsus and Swedenborg. The unhappily assorted pair never agreed, and I, as a friend of the family, had no difficulty in winning the affections of the woman who had married the offspring of an unimaginative lawyer and a petticoated spiritualist.

Harold had published six "impossible" novels. By the publication of every one of them he lost money, and when, at last, the reviewers began to take notice of his latest and most extravagant book, he was almost penniless.

Laura, who loved life, was disgusted with her husband's indifference to practical considerations. I interested her by continually talking about the rise and fall of the stock market. Her husband despised sport, speculation, and the movies. Laura worshiped all three. She played tennis and hockey, and went regularly to baseball matches. I accompanied her, while Harold stayed at home reading or writing. The affair went on pleasantly for five years when suddenly Harold, no longer able to bear the irritation caused by Laura's sneers and reproaches, began to turn on her, and sometimes abused her.

One night, Laura and I were out late and came back to her husband's house shortly before daybreak. Harold came to meet us at the hall door, and sarcastically quoted a well known passage in Byron's "Don Juan." This made me feel ridiculous, and, under an impulse of uncontrollable anger, I drew my automatic revolver and shot him dead.

Laura fainted. I was arrested, tried, and found guilty.

Before the day fixed for my execution, I made a will, leaving all I had in the world to Laura.

My last moments were by no means painless. Those who pretend that the electric shock which kills the convicted criminal is not terrible are liars or ignorant fools.

2

BUT here I was in "the next world" and the man I had killed had assured me I had done him a service by shooting him.

No words can describe the place where I and my victim met. It was not so much a place as an atmosphere.

I might say that I reclined on air, for my body seemed to have no weight and no substance. Harold's face was just as it had been during his earthly life, with this difference: there were no angles, no protuberances, in a countenance which had always looked bizarre. When I killed him, he was between thirty and forty. His eyes were blue, with a slightly sardonic expression. He was clean-shaven and slightly bald. His face had all these characteristics still, but the animal traits had vanished. I realized that in spite of his bodily vesture he was a spirit.

His first words astounded me. Talk of forgiving injuries and loving your enemy!

"Harold, you are too kind to the scoundrel who took away your life," I faltered.

"Not at all," said Harold, and his smile grew warmer. "I often thought of suicide as a way out. Laura, you know, was a nuisance. She hated my ideas. She called them 'nonsense'. She often told me I should become a stock broker instead of writing books that did not 'pay'. Of course, she did not understand that I was indifferent to what men like you call success. I gradually came to the conclusion that the greatest curse is birth and that the true ideal is to cease to live. I treated her with scorn in order to make you attack me in her defense. It was all right."

I asked myself whether this was not a posthumous nightmare. The cordiality of my victim almost brought tears to my eyes. It was some time before I could utter a word.

"Anyhow, Harold, we are both dead now," I said.

"Yes, but we are saved."

The situation was becoming bewildering. "Saved!" How could we be saved? I asked him what he meant, and his smile became irresistible.

"I mean just what I say, Jack. Your worldly clergymen don't come within a million miles of comprehending these things. God does not condemn human nature. He only condemns the distortion, the depravity, of human nature. My wife had an antipathy to my philosophy of life. She hated my views. You liked her (possibly you would contend that you loved her) but I displeased, or rather horrified her. When I 'insulted' her, as she and you might have put it, you shot me. I wanted to die. Don't you see, every one of us was right, according to our own logic?"

His Socratic convincingness made me feel, at the same time, intellectually satisfied and spiritually remorseful. Could it be that he was fooling me and that the course he was taking was the most subtle form of vengeance?

3

BUT it was soon manifest that Harold had spoken with a candor far greater than he had ever exhibited on earth. He now gently drew me from my reclining posture so that we moved forward arm in arm.

The landscape was beautiful. There were no fields, no trees, no streams, no houses; but Life in its fullest emanation filled my very soul with happiness.

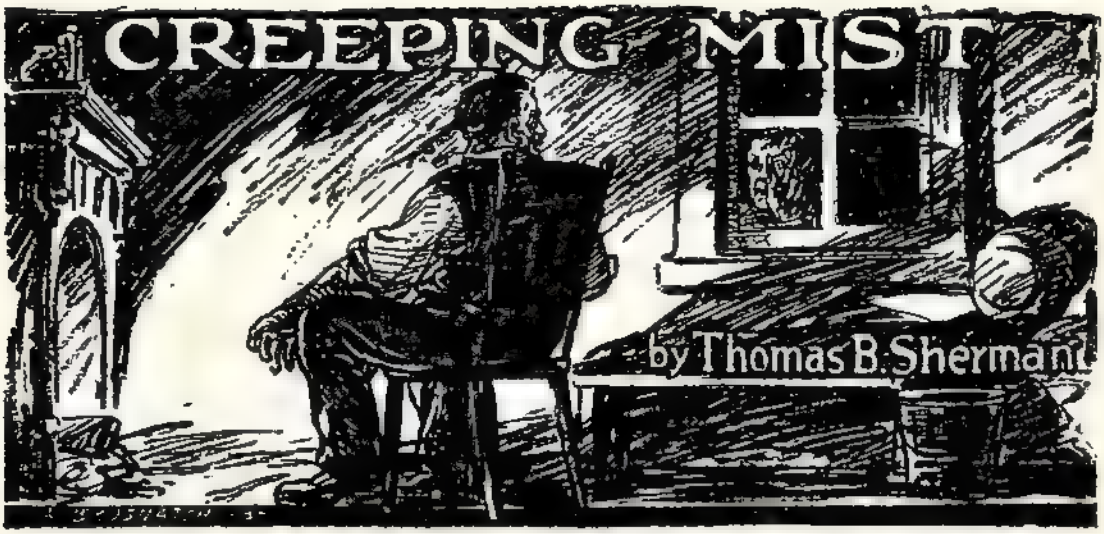
"You now can do just as you like, Jack," said Harold. "We are free from the bonds of that world we have shaken off like the dust from our feet."

After a pause, he asked: "Would you go back to Laura, if you could?"

I felt myself a new man, a spirit growing out of the miserable bondage that is the lot of the human brute.

"No," I replied, emphatically. "For weeks before the end came, I had ceased to care for her."

Then, in that world of spirits, we clasped hands.



LORBER was the only person in the court-room who wasn't staring at the condemned man. Lorber had his eyes down and was almost fighting to make his way through the crowd. By some uncanny effort of will he had managed to stick out the trial. Now he wanted to get out —out and away.

But the crowd, moved by a contrary impulse, was swaying toward the railing that ran the length of the room. The sheriff had clamped a single handcuff on his prisoner's wrist, and with the other attached to his own was leading the man toward a side door. Lorber felt himself being pushed slowly backward. For a moment he had lowered his shoulder and was starting to lunge forward when a sudden sweep of the crowd spun him around and pinned him against the railing.

Inevitably he lifted his head. He felt exactly as if some peremptory hand had raised it for him. He tried to close his eyes, but something that was like a physical force kept them open. A chain rattled and he was face to face with the condemned man.

To the other spectators the movement that Wethers, the prisoner, now made, was nothing more than a nervous gesture—a fretful attempt to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. To Lorber, it was one sight he had hoped never to see. There was no chance for Lorber to miss it. He was standing close enough to count the minute powder burns in Wethers' face. He saw the gesture in detail. He saw the prisoner swing his left hand upward with the palm out and the two first fingers distended in the shape of a V. Through the opening, as the hand of the condemned man rested for half a second on his face, his one good eye peered out pale and unblinking at Lorber.

A short guttural sound escaped from Lorber's throat. His body sagged. In another moment the sheriff had jerked the condemned man through the door.

THOUGH the trial had been a Roman holiday for the people of Hanover, its result was foretold before it started. The evidence against Wethers was unqualifiedly damning. Two neighbors had actually seen him kill the old man. But by the time these two men, running at full speed, had rushed into the Nightingale back yard, Wethers was lost in the woods. Twenty minutes later the whole town

was beating through the countryside. But they didn't find Wethers—that day or the next. How he covered his trail so quickly was never fully explained. People weren't very much interested in that after he was given up.

Somehow, though, with the shouts of searchers ahead of him and behind him, he had worked his way through interlocking tree tops to Village Creek. He forded Village Creek for half a mile, then ran a scant fifty yards and walked into Nick Lorber's cabin.

Wethers had many claims on Lorber. The strongest of these was their former association in Mulvaney's gang of rum-runners. This was hardly a sentimental association. Not friendship, but the tradition of a grisly finish for squealers, was what held the Mulvaney gang to loyalty and what kept alive, after twenty years, a grim sense of obligation toward each other in these two survivors. One such finish Lorber had seen with his own eyes. He saw Mulvaney himself tip this man the sign. Over a stein of beer Mulvaney had thrown up his left hand and enclosed his left eye between his two first fingers. Three days later the offender was found dead on the beach. But it wasn't so much that he was dead that made this corpse unforgettable. It was what had been done to him before he was killed.

Lorber was bending over the body when Wethers came up the beach. It was his first meeting with Wethers, and the malignant satisfaction that showed in the latter's hard blue eyes scarred Lorber's memory even more than the sight of the dead man. In fact, everything about Wethers suggested a ruthlessness that was both terrible and incomprehensible to Lorber. Wethers' head was massive. His face was heavily seamed, and blue with powder burns. A deeply sunken socket marked the place where his right eye had been.

Wethers never quite understood the reason for Lorber's subsequent tractability, though he made use of it in many ways. But he did observe that Lorber was close-mouthed and scrupulously observant of the Mulvaney discipline.

Of course the rum-running days were gone. Both Wethers and Lorber had degenerated into semi-respectability. But Wethers, to Lorber, was still a terrible and incomprehensible figure. And Lorber, to Wethers, was just as tractable as ever.

So Wethers didn't hesitate a second in claiming Lorber's cabin as sanctuary. He found Lorber frying two strips of bacon in the fireplace.

"They're after me, Nick," he said. "You'll have to hide me."

Lorber inserted a calloused index finger into the sizzling grease and turned the bacon over.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, looking up.

"I've killed Old Man Nightingale," answered Wethers.

Lorber made no reply. Wethers didn't seem to notice this. He appeared to be looking for something. His eyes were making a swift survey of the room. Finally he walked to the door of a large closet, dropped on his knees inside and ran his hands up and down the floor. In a moment he had lifted what appeared to be a trap door, but he replaced it almost immediately. He walked back into the room and sat down on the iron bed.

"Yes," he said, "I killed old man Nightingale, the dirty, thieving—" Here he went off into a somewhat familiar aspersion on the old man's antecedents.

When night came, Lorber cooked supper for the two, then walked to town. When he returned three hours later, instead of cutting directly through the woods he took a turn around by the oyster-canning plant. It happened to be one of those peculiarly beautiful nights that are charac-

teristic of the Southern coasts. A full yellow moon was up and a soft mist was hanging over the marshes.

It was not the seduction of the night, however, that protracted Lorber's return. He had seen such nights before, and if he ever thought of them at all, he thought of them as being bad for his sciatica.

Lorber's whole condition was traceable to the bulletin in front of the *Hanover Tribune* office, which announced that Billy Nightingale had offered a reward of $1,000 for the slayer of his uncle. For the first time in his memory Lorber was struggling between two decisions. The slow-moving machinery of his mind pushed him alternately one way, then the other. . . . Two days later he knocked at the sheriff's door and told that official where Wethers could be found.

AFTER the sheriff had pulled Wethers through the door, the crowd in the court-room quickly dissolved. Lorber leaned for a moment or two longer against the rail, then began to move unsteadily toward the door that led into the street. He remembered that his hat had fallen off and retraced his steps. In stooping for it he lost his balance and fell. A lingering bailiff stared at him curiously, ventured a tentative suggestion of assistance if Lorber were sick. Lorber shook his head and got to his feet. Once in the street he started toward home.

It was dark by the time he struck the shell road. A mist was again hanging over the marshes, but the moon had been blotted out by heavy cloud banks. He was walking so rapidly that by the time he had reached his cabin he was breathing hard and there was a catch in his side. He lighted his hanging lamp and built a fire. He was shivering. Several hours later, the fire having died down, he tried all the windows and the door, put out the lamp and lay down on the bed without removing his clothes. The mist over the marshes was rising and flooding the countryside. Lorber felt the air growing thick and damp. He pulled a blanket over himself. After a while he slept. Fitful images disturbed him, however. Shadows whirled across the screen of his inner consciousness.

Then suddenly he started up and was staring, wide awake. Across the room, outlined against the window, was a shape that grew more definite as he looked. He saw a man's head. He tried to turn away but couldn't. He felt his muscles gathering. He screamed and cleared the room in a leap. A chair fell clattering to the floor. In Lorber's hands was an overcoat he had flung across the back of the chair the previous morning. The connection between the stiff overcoat and the shape against the window was obvious. But Lorber slept no more that night.

He went to town at sun-up and engaged a room at the Reid House. By special request he was assigned to one that opened directly upon the lobby and lounging room. This being through, he went over to the sheriff's office in the county jail, and with a feeble effort at being casual—with even a certain faltering attempt at jocularity—he sought to ascertain news of the condemned man, Wethers.

The sheriff had gone over to St. Mary's. Bill Krauss, his chief deputy, was holding the county keys and containing himself with difficulty. Krauss considered that the importance of his position as custodian over an unmistakable murderer demanded that he wrap himself about with a certain solemn silence. He would have been disposed to treat Lorber coldly, anyhow, for Lorber was now being generally shunned in Hanover.

But opposed to these tendencies was the stronger, more human feeling of a naturally garrulous man who has in

his possession what he considers a lot of interesting information. So even the maladroit interrogations of Lorber were sufficient to draw him out.

As they were talking, a short, thin-faced man with a three days' growth of beard on his face entered the room. Lorber recognized him as Dr. Floden. The deputy led Dr. Floden out into the jail. Returning presently, Krauss resumed his seat and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Been to see Wethers every day," he said.

"Yeah!" said Lorber.

"Yeah," echoed Krauss. Then, after a pause: "Queer feller, that Floden."

Lorber shrugged.

"He ain't so queer."

The deputy's reference to the emaciated "doctor" was representative of a widespread sentiment regarding Floden. The whole town thought him queer. Years ago he had been disbarred from the legitimate practise of his profession and now existed solely, so far as anybody knew, upon what negroes paid him for home remedies he made up for their use.

Lorber, though, had known Floden familiarly. He had known him in such a way that he could not possibly regard the man as sinister, no matter how much strange apparatus he tinkered with. Nor was he disturbed at the news of daily conferences between Floden and Wethers, even though Floden, in the old days, had had some sort of connection with Mulvaney. Floden, Lorber learned, had requested Wethers' body and was going to bury it on private ground, in the woods back of Floden's house. Well, that was all right. Lorber was not interested in Wethers, anyhow. What he wanted was general information such as: How old was the present jail? Had many prisoners ever escaped from custody? Did the sheriff put on extra guards when he had a murderer?

LORBER slept soundly, his first night in the Reid House. A friendly ribbon of light filled the space where door and sill failed to meet; voices from the lobby droned a reassuring diapason in his ears until far into the night. He finally drifted off into a warm and comfortable void.

On the second night alien sounds filtered into his room. He listened for the voices from the lobby; instead he heard the far-away ring of horses' hoofs, the screech of a locomotive, the sudden baying of a dog and an insistent chorus of vague, unidentified rattles and creaks. He dug his head into his pillow and fought to empty his mind. He placed his hand over his ear, but heard a voice like roaring waters and removed it.

Presently he arose, put on his clothes and turned on the electric light.

A calendar showed that five days must pass before the execution. Lorber wondered how he would stand them—what he would do. A few days later the night clerk wondered what he wouldn't do next. The night clerk might have been heard complaining that "the guy" (meaning Lorber) was driving him "nutty". For Lorber, with his door slightly ajar, paced restlessly up and down, and just as restlessly turned over the leaves in the Gideon's Bible. Periodically he came out into the lobby, and at odd times he walked over to the sheriff's office in the jail.

But the five days did pass and the morning of the execution did finally arrive. Standing at his window, drawn with loss of sleep, Lorber saw the crowds gathering. Wagons and Fords were coming in from as far away as St. Mary's. Not more than twenty-five persons, officials and all, would be allowed in the jail yard when Wethers was hanged, but at least two thousand would come into town and stay until 11 o'clock had struck.

Lorber thought he would walk out into the country and time his return so as to reach town after the hanging was over. He accordingly struck out along Gloucester street and turned off into the Darien road. After a while he reached the Seaslope Inn. It seemed to him that at least two hours must have passed. He asked a pedestrian for the time, and was informed that it was only half past 9.

He could not bring himself to go any farther. He turned about and started back toward Hanover. When he came in sight of the jail, he saw a crowd of men and boys and a few women packed against two sides of the enclosure. Lorber shouldered his way among those who were closest to the brick wall and took a stand near the sheriff's gate, now closed and barred. Nobody was doing anything or saying anything. They were just waiting. Most of them were looking fixedly at the row of spikes that ran along the top of the brick wall.

The minute hand of the courthouse clock, plainly observable by every one in the crowd, was gradually completing the circle. Some one standing near Lorber pulled out his watch. It showed exactly 11.

A prisoner on the top floor of the jail, with his face pressed against the bars, suddenly called out to somebody in the crowd:

"Ho, Bill! Hey there, Bill!"

Bill made no reply. Nobody answered. Four or five men raised their eyes nervously.

"Hey there, Bill!" called the voice again. "I see you. Hee, hee! I see—"

The court-house clock began to strike. When the final stroke was rung, Lorber thought his heart would stop with it. For a moment all nature seemed to suspend. Then one of the negro boys in the sycamore made a sharp whistling sound with an indrawn breath. The crowd swayed.

Twenty minutes later Lorber saw the death wagon pull out of the side gate. Jake Poole, the undertaker, casually chewing tobacco and spitting on the singletree, was driving. Dr. Floden was by his side.

LORBER spent two days more in town—then returned to his cabin on Village Creek. During these two days he slept soundly, ate unsparingly and expanded with a sort of animal delight. His expansiveness took the form of friendly overtures to approved members of the community.

Dr. Floden, he learned, had by special permission taken the man's body to his house and embalmed it himself. Jake Poole came around later and helped him transport the coffin to the burial plot, and these two men, with a negro grave-digger, completed the fact of burial. The location of the grave, as described to Lorber, was about two hundred yards from the Darien road, and an equal distance in the rear of Dr. Floden's house. A snarl of underbrush and small trees, he was told, hid it from the sight of anyone traveling along the road. Nevertheless, Lorber took the shell road when he started back to his cabin.

Arriving about dusk, Lorber threw some brushwood into the fireplace and started a fire. Darkness came down rapidly about the cabin. Lorber lit one of his lamps, lifted a frying pan from the wall and prepared his supper of scrambled eggs and bacon.

He remembered that he had failed to lock the door and rose to do so. While he was shooting the night latch he looked out toward the marshes and saw the mist rising steadily and creeping toward him through the woods.

Lorber shivered, closed the door and returned to the fire. As he munched the remainder of his supper he considered returning to town. The Reid House in retrospect glowed with warmth. He decided that tomorrow

or the next day he would move into Hanover permanently.

Presently he dropped a fork from his wooden plate and leaned forward to pick it up. To do this he had to shift his body slightly. But before he could actually retrieve the fork from the floor a moving whiteness at the window—something that his eye had suddenly caught—caused his body to grow rigid. He thought at first that it was the mist. Then what was just a whitish blur took shape as the cheeks, mouth, nose and one good eye of a face pressed against the window pane. . . .

Lorber tried to speak, but the sound died in his throat. A flickering impulse of reasoning in Lorber insisted that his eyes were being tricked. This thing at the window was an illusion—but illusion or not, Lorber saw that the one good eye in the white face was now staring at him from between two forked fingers of a hand that had suddenly come into view. Lorber passed his own hand jerkily before his eyes. The effect was that of a sponge being passed over a slate. The face at the window had disappeared.

Lorber leapt to his feet, wrenched open the door and rushed outside. Stumbling and panting he made his way around to the side of the cabin. He walked back and forth uncertainly, then stopped for a moment to peer into the darkness. He strained his ears for the noise of retreating footsteps. He fancied he heard the faint, far-away crackling of dry leaves, but as he listened even more intently the only certain sound that came to his ears was the even murmur of the creek.

He returned to the cabin, closed the door, drew the rough burlap curtains across the windows on both sides of the room, and sat down in front of the fire. Though scarcely five minutes had passed, he was now wondering if the face at the window had actually been a human face. He strove to recreate the scene. Over and over again he passed this image—this familiar face and eye resolving out of a misty blur—through his mind. After a while he began to think he must have had a bad dream.

He lay down on the bed and tried to sleep, but his thoughts were feverishly alive. . . . It must have been a dream, he told himself. It must have been a dream. And even if it were not a dream . . . . it cou'dn't have been Wethers . . . . for Wethers was dead. Wethers was dead and buried, with his neck broken.

Lorber returned to his place in front of the fireplace. For an interminable time he sat there, looking behind him occasionally, shuffling his feet, and periodically piling more wood upon the fire. An occasional rattle of wheels was borne to his ears, faintly, from the shell road. Some one shouted—some negro walking toward town. Abruptly Lorber arose, picked up a lantern from the floor, lit it and started out of the door.

He made off through the woods in the direction of the Darien road. He walked slowly at first, but gradually increased his pace until he was almost running. Once he tripped over a bush and fell sprawling. It was several minutes before he could keep a match going long enough to relight the extinguished lantern.

Crossing the Darien road he turned toward Hanover. He came to a small weather-beaten gray house surrounded by a picket fence. Here he stopped, apparently to get his bearings, but after a minute or two started off again toward the left. He seemed to be measuring his steps. The underbrush grew very thick after he had gone about two hundred yards. Pushing forward slowly, he finally came to a small clearing. There, by the sickly lantern light, he saw a mound marked with a small, white headstone. A few feet away, a pick and shovel still lay where the grave-digger had left them.

Lorber walked slowly around the grave, holding his lantern aloft. For at least five minutes he stood in this position. He then started back the way he had come, but stopped before he had gone five yards. He threw down his lantern, walked hurriedly back to where the pick and shovel lay, seized the shovel and dug it into the grave. He started working feverishly, for the sky was beginning to grow pale. Day was coming on. He leveled the mound. He dug down a foot—a foot and a half. A branch cracked behind him.

"I guess I'm the feller you're lookin' for," said a voice.

Lorber turned. A man was advancing toward him out of the mist.

The man was Wethers.

THE sheriff, sleepy and irritated and clad in nothing but his trousers, stared uncomprehendingly at the agitated little man in front of him.

"What's that you say?" he asked.

"Wethers—he's loose," answered Dr. Floden.

"Wethers? What Wethers?"

"Bill Wethers."

"Bill Wethers!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Why, man, what's the matter with you?"

"The feller's crazy," suggested Bill Krauss, who also showed the effects of an untimely rising.

"I think he must be," said the sheriff. "Don't you know Bill Wethers is dead?"

"But he's not. That's just what I've been trying to tell you, sheriff," insisted Floden.

The sheriff walked across the room and drew a cup of water from the lavatory faucet. He dashed this into his face, dried the water with a towel and returned to Floden.

"Now tell me that again."

"It's like this," Floden began. "A few days after Bill was sentenced I came around to see him. I had been experimenting—with some rats and kittens—and I believed I could restore life to a human body if I got it soon enough after death. I told Bill this. He laughed at me—but said he didn't care what became of his confounded old body. So I made arrangements, as you know, to have the body turned over to me for burial."

"You mean to tell me—?"

"Just a minute, just a minute. . . . I fixed up a dummy just so that the weight of the coffin would be right. On the day Bill was hanged I rushed the body around to my house—I had the devil of a time getting rid of Jake Poole, but he finally left. I shoved Bill on to the operating table and examined him. Luckily his neck wasn't broken at all. He had been strangled to death by the rope—otherwise I would have had to brace the vertebrae. I then clapped my electric pulmotor to him, and in twenty minutes he was breathing again."

"What?" shouted the sheriff. "What's that thing?"

"A pulmotor. But wait just a minute: let me tell you the rest. On the day before he was hanged Bill said that there was only one reason he would want to come back to life. He wanted to get Nick Lorber. That scared me. My only reason for wanting to make the experiment was to see whether it could be done. I told Bill that unless he would agree to clear out of Hanover in case I was successful, that I would drop the whole thing. He promised, but he looked a little queer. Well—"

Floden, who had been talking rapidly, stopped a moment to catch his breath. The sheriff was staring at him in fascination. Bill Krauss had grown white.

"Well," Floden resumed, "I hid him in my back room. He was a bit weak at first. But he was strong enough to pull a chair up to a win-

dow and watch Jake Poole, the two niggers and me—carrying his coffin back to the grave. He thought that was a great joke. He didn't leave that room for two days. I brought his food to him. . . . But last night, I came back from town and found that he was gone. I was afraid to say anything about it at first. But all during the night I kept remembering what he had said about getting Lorber. Finally about five o'clock I got up and walked over to Lorber's cabin. He was missing, too. . . . So I came here."

The sheriff grabbed him roughly by the arm.

"You ain't crazy or playin' any fool joke on me, are you?"

"So help me God, no."

"Bill," he shouted, "go over and get Chew and Dupont and you-all join me right away at Floden's house."

Krauss started out of the door, but paused long enough to throw a dazed glance back at Floden.

The sheriff hurriedly pulled on a coat. The two left the jail and started up the road on the run. For several minutes preceding the arrival of his deputies, the sheriff and Floden reconnoitered the premises of Floden's house hoping to find some sort of fresh trail that would suggest the direction in which a search should be started. The two men had worked outward until they were about fifty yards behind the house.

By the time Bill Krauss came up with Chew and Dupont the sky had become pink.

"I suppose we had better go over and look at Lorber's place," said the sheriff.

Just then Doctor Floden seized his arm.

"Look there," he said, with a sharp intake of breath.

"Where—what?"

"There. Straight ahead."

AT THE spot in the woods indicated by Floden's pointed finger the underbrush was being periodically shaken.

"That's where the grave is," said Floden tensely.

The sheriff motioned to the deputies and all five men started forward. Bill Krauss's face was chalk-white. When the party was within twenty yards of their objective, Krauss suddenly stumbled, and let out a hysterical oath. The next moment, the bushes ahead were parted and the upper part of a man's body appeared.

"There he is," yelled Floden.

The man snarled and jumped backward.

"Stop where you are," shouted the sheriff, leaping forward. "Stop, damn you, or I'll shoot."

There was a crash in the bushes and the sound of heavy feet beating upon the dry, October leaves. The sheriff fired twice, threw himself through the bushes, and fired three more rounds. Chew and Dupont were immediately behind him.

Just outside of the little clearing they found the man lying face downward. The sheriff turned him over. It was Wethers—and he was dead. An open jack knife stuck out of his breast pocket.

They dragged the body out into the clearing and Doctor Floden made a perfunctory examination of his heart. The sheriff, noticing the grave for the first time, walked over and looked downward.

"My God!" he shouted. "Look here!"

The others rushed over. They saw a man lying on his back with his hands behind him and his feet partially covered with dirt.

"It's Lorber!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Say, Nick—what's the matter here?"

But Lorber, though his lips moved, and his eyes rolled, made no answer. His tongue had been cut out.

BENEATH a scrawny tree, two shadowy figures stood whispering.

"He has bought the place, and says that he will stay," growled the first.

"He must be removed by the thirteenth. You know the law!"

"I will find a way. Give me Number Three to help."

"I will see Three tonight. . . Silence forever."

"The Five supreme," answered the first shadow.

His voice, as he finished, ascended in pitch to a ridiculous squeak.

Solemnly saluting, the two melted away into the darkness.

SEVEN nights later, John Keifer crashed wildly out of his house and sped over the dank lawn before it, screaming like a man who is tottering on the brink of insanity. Then his feet found the weed-incrusted brick walk, which, strangely enough, afforded him some relief. As he was a man of courage, his cries subsided and he turned and looked behind him at the place he called home. Above him it loomed, weird, menacing. Over to the left, a green slit of window betrayed the library he had left so hurriedly. John Keifer shuddered. He was cold as well as afraid, for he was attired in only his bathrobe and slippers. Suddenly he faced about, and with a wary eye over one shoulder, marched off down the road, fearful at every step that a something would drift from that evil room to strangle him.

Before he had taken a dozen steps he stopped and listened. Drawing nearer, another pair of feet rasped the pavement. Keifer wished with all his soul that he had a gun or a pocket-knife or a club, or anything that would lend comfort to a man on a lonesome road at a lonely hour of the night. His spirits had acquired such a pessimistic hue that the possibility of the newcomer being anyone else than a thug never entered his head. Whoever he was, he must pass under that street lamp.

"Ah!" sighed Keifer. Next door neighbor, and in his hand an ugly cane! No doubt, aroused by the turmoil, he had come down the road to investigate. Keifer knew him slightly, but at this moment felt sweep over him a great wave of fondness, almost affection, for this man.

"Smith," he said, "I am certainly glad to see you."

He earnestly shook Smith's hand.

"Um-m," replied Smith. Keifer thought he could read in his eyes the suspicion that he, Keifer, had been drinking. Perhaps Smith had never formed a habit of meeting elderly gentlemen attired in bathrobes promenading the streets in the chill hours of the morning. John was irritated anyway, feeling as undignified and helpless as a man in a barber chair; and so he condemned Smith's lack of confidence, swearing and cursing fluently.

Smith stared at him a moment, torn between the desire to laugh and rage at Keifer's scathing remarks.

"I didn't say a word about drink, my friend. Let me help you home to bed."

"No—No! For the love of heaven don't go near that house!"

He spoke with such feeling that Smith was impressed. Keifer saw his advantage, and seized Smith's arm.

"Come on. If you'll put me up for the night I'll tell you all about it."

This last remark was a bribe. He knew that Smith, being a lawyer, must have a well developed bump of curiosity. Whether the bump concerned itself with spirits of the earthly or heavenly variety troubled him not at all if it would put any roof over his head but his own. A moment's thought, and Smith nodded assent to John's proposal. His was not the whole-souled, back-slapping cordiality of the usual host, for he felt rather doubtful of John, and feared that he might prove troublesome before long.

After a short walk, they reached Smith's home, a small place that radiated a cozy, common-sense atmosphere, and made Keifer feel less skeptical about the solidity of the universe. Smith brought Keifer into his den. Keifer knew that it was his den, for the walls of the room looked as if they had been transplanted from a sporting-goods store. Drawing chairs up to a newly-awakened fire, Smith reached a box of cigars from under a table. When he had enveloped himself in a cloud of soothing Havana smoke, he spoke to Keifer.

"Now for the story. Tomorrow is Sunday, and I can sleep late, so you can go as far as you like."

Keifer seemed to be dreaming with his eyes open. The ash on his cigar grew long, and finally fell, a tiny gray heap, upon the carpet. Sharp-eyed Smith noted that his hand trembled. He began abruptly.

"Maybe you think I've been drinking. But I haven't. Don't use liquor, for most of my life has been spent in the tropics where such a thing would be suicidal. No more than any other man, I've never believed in ghosts or such stuff. But tonight. . . ."

Eyes dark with thought, Keifer seemed to be staring through Smith into the past. Smith squirmed uneasily. Then Keifer again took up his story, a tinge of horror in his voice.

"I live by myself, and work into the small hours of the morning upon a book I am writing. Several nights ago there came three taps on my window, and the door behind my back swung open. It was touched by no living man, for I was in the hall before anyone could have gotten away. Next night, at the same hour, the same thing happened. This time I had the window curtains drawn apart, and could see that no one touched the glass. Tonight after the taps, and after the door had opened, I became conscious of a presence behind me. Perhaps you know the feeling. A sort of sixth sense is the cause of it. I forced myself to turn and look. There stood a huge, shapeless, grinning black thing, with hands outstretched for my throat.

"I suppose I played the baby. My nerves are unstrung anyway from a fever I picked up in the South. For the time I became a howling lunatic with but one thought: to get out of that room and get out quick. I felt

like a man in a nightmare—paralyzed, could hardly lift my feet. I knew that the monster behind me was gaining in leaps and bounds. . . . About the time I came to myself, you happened along."

Keifer relapsed into glum silence, and Smith, between puffs, studied him. Smith was no fool, and could see that he was entertaining a man of intelligence, perhaps a celebrity in a small way. Then he cross-examined Keifer. Bit by bit he took his story apart and scrutinized the pieces carefully.

"Got any servants?" he questioned.

"I told you I hadn't."

"Seen anybody wandering around your place lately?"

"No. Some time ago, though, I chased away an Italian."

"What! An Italian?"

"Yes. Nothing peculiar about that. He said that he had come up from the railroad, and as he didn't know my house was occupied, was taking a short cut through to town. You know my grounds run back near a mile to the railroad."

"Hum-m," grunted Smith. "There may be something in this. You see, there's a story—Oh, rats! It's impossible. We'll look over things in the morning."

OVER an excellent breakfast, Keifer met Smith's wife, a fluffy little creature, who, true to the nature of woman, viewed the events of the night before from an alarmingly superstitious angle. Blue eyes wide with excitement, she told of the man who had last lived in Keifer's home. He had been an artist. With his wife he lived in a sort of modest comfort. Then one day he returned home to learn that his wife had cast her lot with another man who could give her fine clothes. He promptly hanged himself in the attic and his body hung undiscovered for five days.

"And ever since," she finished, "his spirit has haunted that house. That's what they say, anyway."

This sad tale added to Keifer's downcast spirits. He hurriedly gulped down a cup of hot coffee to hide his emotion. Smith's wife seemed troubled.

"But that's not the worst of it," she began, "I don't know how true it is—"

Happening to glance at her husband, she stopped suddenly, for he was madly motioning her to be silent.

"As far as ghosts are concerned," Smith interrupted, "I am a skeptic. Let's take a look at your haunted house."

Pushing back their chairs, and reinforcing themselves with the friendly aroma of several more of Smith's cigars, they sauntered off down the road on their ghost hunt. Gray-headed Keifer, attired in a dashingly modern suit of Smith's clothes, made an appearance that would have given a tailor the nightmare.

"Gloomy old place," Smith ventured, surveying Keifer's home with disfavor.

Keifer said nothing. His eyes seemed to reflect the melancholy stare of its vacant windows. Smith suddenly became interested in a scrawny little tree abreast the library. He examined its bark, and then followed Keifer through the French window that had served as a means of hasty exit the night before.

The room had the earmarks that sometimes betray a bachelor establishment: papers thrown about, dust, and a general air of untidiness. The green student lamp was still burning its sickly glow battling hopelessly with a glorious burst of sunshine from the uncurtained windows. Smith took inventory of the room, walking around, hands in pockets, and finally arriving at the windows.

"O-ho!" he cried, with the air of a man who has just made a significant discovery.

He stepped through the window on to the porch, and picked from the window pane a tiny, flattened white ball.

"Hard dough," he pronounced, after tasting it.

Then he rummaged around under the window and found several similar balls. Keifer took little interest in his strange antics, but Smith seemed greatly encouraged.

"Lead me to that door," he commanded, "the one that opens."

Keifer pointed to the door. Smith turned the knob and then released it. The door, of its own weight, swung ponderously open. Leaving a gap of perhaps a foot, it stopped, and Smith stepped into the murky hallway. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he discerned towering walls covered with moldy tapestries, and, in the foreground, a massive flight of stairs. The floor and stairway were hidden beneath a heavy carpeting into which his feet sank without sound.

Keifer stood behind Smith in the doorway, and Smith moved aside to allow him to pass, taking his hand from the knob on the outside of the door. To his surprize, his fingers stuck to its lower surface. He examined the knob, picking from it several wads of a dark, sticky substance.

"Ah-ha!" he announced another discovery. "Do you chew gum?" he asked Keifer, who scowled at this seemingly irrelevant remark.

"No!"

"Then how come you've got it stuck all over your door knob?"

"Maybe that artist's wife—"

"No artist's wife ever enjoyed this gum, although I'd believe it of her. It's soft and sticky. You know how gum hardens in a few days after it's been chewed."

"Uh-huh," vaguely answered Keifer.

Smith went down on his hands and knees to search the floor. His fingers plunged into a small, round hole.

"What's this?" he asked.

"It leads to the basement," Keifer explained. "Used to be a speaking tube there, I believe. Here's another one, if you get any pleasure out of them."

He pointed to a similar hole in the wall running into the library at the height of his head.

Smith sat down on the floor, staring in turn at the door knob and at the two holes.

"Item number two for the little black book," he murmured softly.

They went back into the library.

"Where did you see that ghost?" he questioned.

Keifer indicated the spot.

"It seemed to be between that tapestry and my chair."

Smith inspected the tapestry, which occupied nearly one-half of the wall opposite the windows. It was of a faded yellow, the figures traced on its surface so blurred that they seemed to blend into the background. He sounded the wall behind it, finding it as honestly solid as any wall should be.

"Sure you had all the doors and windows locked?"

"Locked and double-bolted after that first night."

"Why didn't you look that hall door—the one with the chewing-gummed knob?"

Keifer hesitated.

"Put it down to stubbornness, if you like. No man or beast ever before bluffed me. If anything wanted to come through that door, it could, and I would settle matters with it on this side. I was knocked off my balance, but leaving that door unlocked preserved some of my self-respect."

"I see," nodded Smith.

A CAREFUL examination of dust-coated window sills and floors throughout the house failed to discov-

er traces of a midnight prowler. The dining-room looked as if it had been unused for decades. A huge, polished surface table occupied the center of the room, and in one corner stood a massive clock. After examining the dust-coated table top and the motionless clock pendulum, Smith shook his head in relief. Finally he asked to see the basement. Keifer led the way down a flight of rickety steps.

Smith stood on a box and tried the window. It swung noiselessly open. He tried to squeeze through. Had his body been several inches less in diameter he might have made it. But although Smith was not a large man, passage for him through that window was as effectually barred as if the window had never existed. He facetiously shook his finger at it.

"You could tell tales," he whispered.

Then Smith prowled about in the semi-darkness until he found a pyramid of boxes in the center of the floor. With a lighted match he examined the topmost box, snorting at what he saw. He snorted again in much the same way when he shifted his gaze to the ceiling directly overhead.

"All right. Let's go. No more down here."

Again in the library he seated himself opposite Keifer, who was sourly-frowning.

"Has anybody got a live, healthy grudge against you?" queried Smith.

"Not to my knowledge."

Smith's manner became grave.

"You said you were in the tropics. Did you ever have anything to do with the Camorra?"

"No."

"Well, all this looks to me like the work of some filthy foreign secret society. I'll tell you what I make of it. Two persons are running this thing, and they certainly show diabolical cunning. One of them crawls through that cellar window—don't ask me how. He kneads a wad of chewing gum between his jaws. Up the cellar steps he goes, and along the carpet in your hall. When he reaches the door, he takes from his pocket a piece of cord like this, which I found on the cellar floor. He buries one end of the cord in the gum, and sticks it to the door knob in such a way that when the cord is run through that hole in the floor, and he yanks on it from his perch on the pile of boxes in the basement, the knob turns and the door swings open. A harder tug will, of course, detach the cord from the gum, and almost destroy all evidence. I suppose the fellow in the basement starts the fireworks from his end when he hears the taps on the window."

"But, my friend," said Keifer, "who tapped on the window, and how?"

"Very simple," assumed Smith, feeling that he had the raw material of a clever detective. "It struck me all in a flash. He used a blow-gun, or a beanshooter, so that he wouldn't make any noise, and shot dough balls at your window from that tree outside. Its bark is scraped off in places, showing that somebody climbed it recently. Here are several of the wads of dough, and the chewing gum I picked off the knob. See the track of the cord in the gum, and notice how that ball was flattened on one side when it hit your window?"

"But how about the black monster?" queried Keifer, leaning back in his chair. "That will take a lot of explaining."

"Yes, it will. I suggest that we let it rest for a while. But there's something I think I'd better tell you. Several months ago, before you moved in, two boys were taking the short cut through your place from the railroad. They saw lights in the dining room, and peeped through the shutters to see who was inside. What they saw frightened them half to death. Around a table stood five black-robed figures, all watching the clock, which

had begun to strike twelve. They didn't wait to see more, but ran for their lives. The next day, feeling bolder perhaps, they went back. They found the back door open, the dust rubbed off the dining-room table, and the clock going. That's the story they told. Somehow I never put much faith in it until today. Then, too, a neighbor, walking past, swore he saw lights in the dining-room. The funny part of it is, the lights were seen each time on the thirteenth of the month. Tonight is the thirteenth."

"Well, what shall we do about it?"

"We'd better wait for them. I think you've got mixed up with a gang of cut-throats who have made this house their hang-out, probably because they know it's avoided as being haunted. They're playing with you in cat-and-mouse fashion."

"Yes, we'll wait. This isn't Italy. I'll see if a man can be chased out of his own home."

The more Keifer thought about it the angrier he got. Blue veins appeared in his face, and he gripped the arms of his chair spasmodically.

After talking a while, they left, dining at Smith's table. Night was falling when they returned for their vigil. Before leaving home, Smith had carelessly dropped a revolver into his pocket. Keifer outlined their plan of action, and prepared the stage for the coming of the villain. He left the windows unlatched, and lit the green student lamp. Smith he seated in a corner so that he could not be seen from outside. Then he placed himself at his desk, where he worked furiously, from time to time delving into weighty volumes piled within reach of his arm. Once his coat swung against the arm of his chair, giving forth a metallic thud, which is foreign to the habits of an ordinary coat under such circumstances.

"Gun," breathed Smith.

The silence was broken only by the furious scratching of Keifer's pen. As time wore on, the tension increased, until Smith felt an insane desire to jump to his feet and yell. He had wound the clock in the dining room, and it boomed out the passing hours: Eight—nine—ten—eleven—

Then came Keifer's hushed voice, almost a whisper. His lips scarcely moved, and the pen scratched on.

"Ready, I heard a step."

Smith started violently. Time passed and nothing happened. Suddenly there came a tap on the window Then another and another. The door knob jerked, squeaked, and the door slowly swung on its hinges. Smith felt that he would strangle from the furious throbbing of the pulses in his throat. He awaited the signal from Keifer, whose actions portrayed the most abject terror. Then a long cone of light shot out from the tree before the window, and rested on the tapestry—Keifer's black monster!

"NOW!" barked Keifer, whirling in his chair and leaping for the window.

Smith by his side, he raced for the little tree. For an instant the light glinted on two drawn revolvers. Then it was extinguished, and there came a scraping sound. Rounding a clump of bushes, they saw a shadowy figure flying diagonally across the lawn toward a walk that led to the back of the house. Keifer sank his fingers into his companion's wrist. Crazed by the man hunt, Smith had raised his gun to shoot.

Back toward the rear of the house they sped, feet crunching on the gravel walk. When they reached the end of the path, the fugitive in front was joined by another, who must have come from the basement. The four crashed wildly down the garden, leaping bushes, dodging trees, the gap between them narrowing but a trifle. A pale moon cast patches of ghostly light through the trees. It was like a scene taken from a fairy book, demons

pursued by the forces of good, for the two in the lead fled soundlessly, and were black from head to foot. Suddenly one of the demons half turned and hurled something at Smith's head. He caught it as it flew by, and as he ran, examined it, finding it to be an electric flashlight.

Then the fugitives curved to the left, and a patch of fire, a winking red eye, appeared. It rapidly drew nearer. Keifer was in the lead. In a moment the two in front came within the glare cast by the flames of a camp fire. Keifer grunted, "There's the rest of 'em," and forced more speed from his aching legs. Anger had given him endurance.

Then one of the demons shouted, "Run, Run! Old whiskers is after us," and upon the last word his voice rose to a ridiculous squeak after the fashion of a boy whose voice is changing.

Keifer and Smith, upon their heels, smashed through the brush, and out into a little clearing. In the center was a fire, and over the fire a pot was bubbling. Three black-robed figures rose to their feet to flee. But it was too late.

"Stop, or I'll drill you!" snarled Keifer, waving his revolver.

Smith came alongside, and exhibited his artillery. Simultaneously the five halted, and ten hands went into the air.

"Tear off that black stuff, and let's have a look at you!" commanded Keifer.

The five obediently struggled a moment, and off came the black, sack-like garments, revealing five boys, ghost-white.

"Saimted godmother!" cried Smith, breaking the silence.

Keifer's face changed expression. Then he replaced his gun in his pocket, and sat down upon a log, and laughed, long, loud, and heartily. He slapped and slapped his knee. It seemed tied to his voice, for at every slap there came a fresh burst of guffaws.

"Did—did you kids work that knob and do all those things?" ventured Smith.

"Uh-huh."

"Why?"

"Well, we wanted to scare ole man—Mister Keifer outa here by making him think his house was haunted."

"But why scare him out?"

"Well, you see—this is the Silent Five, and we meet at twelve midnight on the thirteenth of every month in the old haunted house. Tonight's the thirteenth, and we couldn't meet with him there—he wouldn't let us."

"You cold-blooded, ruthless scoundrels," Keifer gurgled.

Things weren't clear to Smith yet.

"How did you make that black monster?" he asked.

The boy smiled wanly.

"I read it in a library book. Flash that light in your hand."

Smith pressed the button, and then he had the answer to the riddle. The light was fitted with double lenses, and on the inner lens was painted a miniature of Keifer's ghost.

"I shined it on that big yellow curtain, and it sure worked fine. You see, Mr. Keifer looks like a sort of a nervous person, and we figured we could get away with all this stuff."

"You had me on the way to the madhouse," said Keifer, wiping his eyes. "Now, I'll tell you what. You admit Smith and me to membership in your order, and I'll let you hold your meetings in my dining-room. All right? Then, as it's not twelve yet, we'll hold the usual meeting in the usual place. But first, let's eat. I think those potatoes on the fire are about done. Smith, have a boiled potato?"

The CASE of the RUSSIAN STEVEDORE

by Henry W. Whitehill

IN MAKING this public statement of the facts, as I know them, in the matter of the death of Dr. Dinwoodie, I am actuated only by a desire to set at rest the many rumors which have been current since his horrible murder. The sad event was in itself sufficiently mysterious, but the wild and exaggerated speculations to which it gave rise are absurd.

My testimony at the coroner's inquest was so garbled by the newspapers that I hardly recognized it, and each reporter added his guess at the solution of the mystery to make it even more puzzling. It is to correct the many misstatements contained in the published versions of my testimony that I have prepared this brief resumé of the facts known to me. I include the queer incident of the Russian stevedore in the hope that it may suggest a clue to the mystery to some mind more analytical than mine. While I am morally certain it was his form I saw and his voice I heard, I may be mistaken. I confess that I can see no reasonable theory which will connect him with the doctor's death except the agitation shown by each at mention of the other. It is certain that in some way they were linked with each other long ago, but what the connection was I have no idea. And if the Russian was responsible for his death—how? And why?

Dr. Augustus Dinwoodie, as everyone who reads must know, was probably the most famous surgeon in the world at the time of his sudden retirement. His wonderful work in plastic surgery—the surgery of replacing bones, of reconstructing tissues and, in some cases, entire organs—made him even before the war undoubtedly the most talked of man in his profession. No one can forget the furor created when he grafted an entire new cranium upon an idiot who had suffered from congenital malformation of the skull. The war gave him his opportunity. That American surgical wizard who replaced features, made new faces, even replaced parts of missing limbs, in the reconstruction hospitals in France has become almost a legendary figure.

About eighteen months ago, while still in the prime of life to all appearances, Dr. Dinwoodie was attacked by a mysterious ailment which neither he nor his many professional friends seemed able to diagnose. His bodily health seemed unaffected, but a strange nervous fearfulness beset him. He suddenly withdrew from his medical practise and secluded himself

from almost everybody. He was haunted by a desire to be away from other people, to be alone, to seek out far places, distant from men and civilization, a desire so intense that it amounted nearly to insanity. Of all his friends, I think I was the only one he cared to have about him. And that is why he came with me to my shooting camp up in the Maine woods.

Even there, miles away from the nearest human habitation, with no person about save the old guide and me, the fear was still upon him. I cannot describe just how he acted. The only way I can express it is that he acted as I imagine a man would act who had committed a great crime and feared discovery and pursuit. He appeared to be continually on the lookout for someone in our rambles in the quiet forest, his ears strained to hear an approaching footstep, his eyes upon every tree or hollow, as if he half expected an accuser to step forth and confront him. The least unexpected noise startled him beyond measure. And once, when I stepped into his bedroom to awaken him, I saw that he slept with a big automatic pistol within reach at his bedside.

In every other respect he appeared perfectly healthy-minded. He was the most brilliant conversationist I ever met, and his fund of experience and anecdote was extraordinarily wide. Many a night I sat until the heralds of daybreak surprized us, a fascinated listener while the doctor talked. But of the cause of his fear he never spoke.

THE Russian came into the matter in this wise: some five weeks or so after we had gone up to my Maine place I was called back to New York by a peremptory telegram to help straighten out a tangle that had arisen about one of our steamboats. It had been chartered by a group of foreigners for some purpose or other—I forget the exact details—which appeared to be perfectly legal and ethical, so far as the papers showed, but just before she sailed, the boat was seized by the government as a filibuster. The boat and my troubles with the government have nothing to do with Dinwoodie's story except that I went down to the dock as she was unloading and saw the Russian.

I was watching the stevedores unloading when my attention was drawn to four men who were carrying a big case which, it turned out, was loaded with rifles. To be more exact, I was attracted by one of the four; for while three of them grunted perspiringly at one end of the case, the fourth easily held up the other. I was talking to Clancy, the wharf boss, at the time I pointed out the man with a question.

"A half-crazy Roossian, he is, I guess," replied Clancy, "at least his name sounds Roossian to me. An' he's as strong as anny four other dockwallopers of the bunch. I think he's a nut—an idjit or somethin' of the kind."

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"Well, he don't seem able to talk much," was the answer. "About all he can say in English so you can understand is his name, Gurul, or somethin' that sounds like it. He came up an' asked for a job a few days ago an' I put him to work. The boys didn't like the funny way he talked, so they started to kid him. Big Red Rafferty, over there, used to be the bully of the dock an' he started in to haze this Roossian fer the fun of it. The nut growled at him once or twice an' when Rafferty wouldn't let him alone he piled into him. It took eight of us an' a club to pull him off an' keep him from tearin' Red in two. Since then they let him alone. I'll call him over so you can hear the funny way he talks, sir."

The Russian (I call him that because Clancy did, not that I was sure of his nationality) came over in response to his wave. He was short and

squat, considerably below medium height, and he had the oddest shaped body I ever saw on a man, all trunk, one might say. His legs were so short they ended about where Clancy's knees were, and they caused him to walk with a peculiarly awkward rolling waddle. But his arms made up for the brevity of his legs. They hung from a pair of enormously wide shoulders and were so long they almost touched the planks of the wharf as he rolled over to us.

When he came nearer I saw the most repulsively ugly face I can ever remember looking upon. His nose was wide and flat and divided a pair of tiny, piglike eyes set as close together as the nose would allow. His jaws bulged noticeably, and when he opened his mouth he displayed a set of large, powerful, yellow teeth, which sat in his jaws with a conspicuous slant forward. The lips were thin and tightly drawn over the teeth.

But it was not his features alone that repelled me: it was his skin. It is rather difficult for me to describe it to you. It looked soft, pink, and without a trace of the tan which comes from work in the open air. Except for the light shade it looked like nothing more than the soft yet rough skin that covers a newly healed wound, in other words, a freshly formed scar faded nearly white.

"What is your name?" I asked.

He glared at me sullenly with his pig eyes and growled, "Me Abe Goril."

I wish I could picture that voice to you. The sound caused a thrill of horror to shake me. It brought to mind vague impressions of indescribable evil. It exuded foulness in its very tones. It was hoarse; it was guttural; but it was more. I remember reading one of Poe's stories in which he speaks of a voice as being "glutinous." That is as near as I can come to expressing how that voice impressed me. I suppose it sounds rather foolish when I say it sounded like a thick, *gummy* growl; but I know of no other word which fits it.

"Are you a Russian?" I asked, as soon as I recovered my composure.

He glowered at me and uttered (I will not call it said), "No un'stan'. Me Abe Goril."

And that was about the sum of our conversation. Most of my questions he did not seem to grasp at all, and I could not understand the greater part of his replies. After a few futile attempts to elicit information, I decided that Clancy was right: the man was evidently not far from an idiot. I waved him back to his work. As he started to waddle away I said to Clancy, "What a queer specimen! I wish Doctor Dinwoodie could see him."

A throaty growl of rage brought me about instantly. The Russian had stopped at my words and was facing me with a snarl of fury on his lips. I was astounded at the change in his face. I hope I may never again see such a picture of hatred and malice as gleamed upon those repulsive features as he took a quick step toward me and barked, "Where doctor? I want see."

"Git out o' this," shouted Clancy as I gave back shuddering. "Git back to your work."

The Russian hesitated and then slowly shambled away. But as long as I remained on the dock I could see him unobtrusively watching me.

Of course, I wondered a good deal about the Russian (as I called him in my mind) and at the emotion he displayed when I mentioned a doctor. But when I returned to the shooting lodge a few days later a greater surprize met me. I told Dinwoodie about the strange character as part of the recital of the incidents of my trip. He uttered a gasp of horror when I described the stevedore and mentioned his name. I shall never forget the unutterable terror that flashed into

his face. He became so ghastly and faint that for a moment I thought he was going to collapse. Before I could spring to his side he had recovered himself and waved me back to my seat. He asked me several questions about the Russian and made me repeat every word of our conversation.

There was something about Dinwoodie's manner that kept me from asking him anything in return. I told him everything I could remember. He told me nothing. But the fear that hovered about him seemed intensified tenfold. He shivered at every sound and his hands trembled when he lifted food to his mouth. In fact, I doubt that he ate a mouthful of supper after my recital. And when darkness came he went from window to window to see that all were fastened, and personally inspected the locks on all the doors. Then he abruptly bade me good-night and retired to his room. I went to bed wondering what lay between the famous Dr. Dinwoodie and the Russian dock hand that could affect each so strangely at the mention of the other.

I REGRET to say that my curiosity was never satisfied. I am inexpressibly sorry now that I did not insist upon some explanation from my friend. If I had I might have been in a position to prevent the tragedy of last week, or at least to guess at the solution of the mystery. But next morning Dinwoodie, bearing every evidence of a sleepless night, told me he was going to leave. And in spite of my entreaties he did go that afternoon. The guide drove him to the nearest railway station and, so far as I was concerned, he disappeared from sight. For more than a year I heard nothing from him, and when I inquired for him on my return to the city, no one knew where he had gone.

This brings me to the happenings of last week. A party of us who are interested in water power sites in these mountains came up to this little, out-of-the-way resort together.

You may imagine my surprize and delight when almost the first person I ran into at the hotel was Dr. Dinwoodie. Of course, we were more than glad to see each other again. After the greetings were over he told me that he had been a resident in the hotel for several months and had benefited greatly from the mountain air. His room was on the third floor adjoining mine overlooking the lake. We sat late that night talking over old times, but neither of us mentioned the Russian.

The next three days I was too busy to spend any time with him, but we promised ourselves some good old fishing trips (the lake and surrounding region is noted by a few wise anglers) in the trout streams on the mountainside.

We arrived at the hotel on Monday. It was Thursday evening that our business was finished and the company formed. We, the members of the company, had a little supper that night in honor of the event, and I am afraid that we forgot all about the prohibition laws.

About 11 o'clock I went out on the veranda for a breath of fresh air. My head was spinning rather dizzily as I wandered to the side of the veranda and looked at the moonlit waters of the lake.

While I stood there a man went by and turned down the path that leads to the rear of the hotel on the side away from the lake. I got just a glimpse of him in the half darkness when he passed through the light that shone from the dining-room windows, but I was struck by something oddly familiar in his awkward, shambling gait. Had I been perfectly sober I might have recognized him. As it was, I wondered vaguely who he could be, but soon dismissed him from my thoughts and went up to my room. I am quite sure my head had

no more than touched the pillow before I was fast asleep.

IT SEEMED to me that I had been asleep but a few minutes when I was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices in the room next to mine. I was only half awake at first: the heavy, dazed awakening of a person who has been drinking; and I lay for some time wondering what had disturbed me. Then I heard them again. I knew the tones; the thick, guttural, rolling tones unlike any other I had ever heard; but for the life of me I could not place them. I tried lazily to clear my mind, but could not arouse myself sufficiently to do so.

Then I heard Dr. Dinwoodie speak. Even in my dazed condition I could recognize the entreaty in his voice. He appeared to be vehemently pleading with some one. I heard him repeat several times, "But I made a man of you. You were a beast and I made a man of you." I am quite sure those were the words, because I wondered sleepily what he could mean.

Then I heard the first voice again. There was a continual rumbling of sound, but I caught only a word or two: "pain," spoken several times; then: "knife," and twice: "kill," the latter in an indescribable, shrill, yet guttural tone, which was almost a scream. It rasped my sleepy nerves and brought me to a sitting posture, shivering with repulsion.

In a flash I was wide awake. It was the unforgettable voice of the Russian stevedore. The shambling figure I had seen in the night from the porch below was the same I had watched waddling across the dock in New York.

At the same instant an appalling, blood-curdling shriek burst from the doctor's room. It was Dinwoodie's voice, but it had lost all semblance of human utterance; it was just stark terror and horror and dismay translated into tone. I sprang from my bed and rushed into the corridor. Other heads came out of opened doorways, and several men in night clothes, as was I, joined me before Dinwoodie's door. I tried the knob. The door was locked. From within the horrid screams, mingled with the sounds of furniture being smashed and bodies thrashing about in a struggle, came to us together with what sounded like the infuriated snarls of a wild animal. Suddenly the sounds of the struggle ceased and we heard a strange noise like a fist pounding upon a muffled bass drum, followed by a harsh, rumbling roar in that gummy voice I have tried to describe to you. Then dead silence.

By this time the hotel was awake. Several of us threw ourselves against the door and broke it in. The room looked as if a hurricane had swept through it. The furniture was smashed to bits and scattered in all directions. The floor, walls, even the ceiling, were sickeningly bespattered with blood. In the midst of the wreckage lay the pieces of Dr. Augustus Dinwoodie. I mean just what I say: pieces. He was literally torn to tatters, every limb wrenched from the trunk and the whole body horribly dismembered beyond description. You will remember that at the inquest the physicians said I was wrong in suggesting the Russian committed the murder because no human strength could possibly have accomplished what we saw.

Otherwise the room was empty. The side window was wide open, but outside it is a sheer drop of forty-five feet to the stony shore of the lake, with only a flimsy lightning rod on that side of the building. No human being could have escaped that way. And no one came out through the only door, which led into the hallway. We found the bloody imprint of an enormous hand upon the window sill. And that was all.

Author of "Thus Spake the Prophetess"

NO OFFICER in any of Uncle Sam's services would have assigned Rodney Davis such a mission as the latter had sought for himself. Yet every officer knew full well that if ever Cerimarie Sam were brought to the justice he deserved it must be accomplished by one brave man, working unhindered and alone. When Davis quietly sought an interview with the commanding officer and calmly asked that he be given the job of bringing in the voodoo priest, the commanding officer looked at him in amazement and no little doubt. Surely a man must be insane to ask for such an assignment—to ask for it! But the C. O. was quite willing to let Davis have his way. Cerimarie Sam, if he existed in fact, which no white man knew for sure, never having seen him, was believed to be the greatest monster in all Haiti. The C. O. would not assign one man to the task, and to send a detachment were worse than useless. No white man knew the inland trails and runways of Haiti as Cerimarie could know them. The proverbial needle in the haystack was a cinch compared to Cerimarie Sam.

The C. O. welcomed Davis with open arms, figuratively speaking. But he wondered. He did not know that little Charlie Hepner, the Music, had been the special friend and protegé of Davis.

Davis had found the little Music. And he would have cried had not stark horror dried any tears that, being a strong man, he might have harbored.

Music had left camp to be gone only for an hour or two, just before sunset. Darkness came and no Music. The detachment in the field, of which Davis was a part, turned out in force and beat the surrounding jungle until daylight, without finding little Hepner. A hard-eyed bunch of men gathered in the early morning about the hasty breakfast, only Davis could not eat. He kept up the search and found Hepner. Dead.

Death in itself is not so horrible to a soldier. In the field he walks always by the monster's side, growing calloused to the thought of dying, even with his boots on, unshriven. But when death is attended with such gory details as those which attended little Hepner, it is something else again. Hepner's clothing had been stripped from his body and the little Music had literally been skinned alive! From just above his ankles the flesh had been cut to the bone and stripped off

over his feet, apparently, as the hunter skins the hide from a rabbit's leg!

Davis' cry of agony as he recognized his little chum carried back to the breakfasting men and something in it chilled every last man of them to the bone. Even before they had reached the terrible scene, each man knew that he was soon to look upon some unspeakable horror. And not the least of the horrors was the appearance of Davis himself. He had become in a few moments a graven marble image, cold as starshine, with eyes that saw but one thing, that recognized neither superior officer nor lunkie. A creature with but one aim in life and no hope beyond that aim. An automaton. A mechanical creature made to rend and destroy.

They sent him back to the capital city, where he spent six months in the study of Haitian *patois*. And, made mentally strong by the fires within him, he mastered the language—if it may be called a language. Then he sought his audience with the man at the helm, was admitted, accepted, and sent forth, to become a pariah in Haiti, where all outside the uniform and without visible means of support are pariahs.

He had known that the slaying of Hepner, right on the very edge of the encampment in the hills, had been the work of Cerimarie Sam. For this one was like a vulture. The detachment had had four or five native prisoners who had run to the scene and looked upon Hepner, and one of them had mentioned the name of the terrible priest before he could check the ejaculation. This had been enough. But the next morning the man who had spoken the dread name had been found dead outside the camp, his lips sewed together with hair from the tail of one of the detachment's horses. The significance of this was too plain to misread.

TWO MONTHS after his departure from the capital city of the Black Republic, Davis, grimy from studied failure to bathe, every inch of his skin dyed ebony black, lips thickened with injections of paraffin, entered a dim trail somewhere in that little known country lying inside the triangle formed by the capital city, Jacmel, and San Pierre. Something whispered to him that fulfilment was at hand. He met natives on the trail and avoided conversation with them with studied carelessness. Later in the day he encountered others, of both sexes, who traveled the same direction as did he. It was much easier to join the pilgrimage than he had thought. Too easy.

When the dim trail branched off into a dimmer trail and most of the people entered this, Davis managed to slip into the jungle on one side until darkness fell. Then he was but another black shadow with those who went before him and those who followed behind.

In a hollow surrounded by beetling hills he saw a great fire in an open place, beyond which was the odd shadow of some sort of building. He knew without being told what the building was. A shell of a place, covered with rude daubs, obscene in the extreme, representing pictures. He could see that many people had gathered about the fire and the building. Restless blacks, beasts of prey more terrible because they were human beasts, slouched here and there, or sat on their haunches, sunken in apathy. They paid him suspiciously little attention as he crept in and joined the devotees.

There was a stir shortly, and expectant craning of necks toward the dark opening in that building beyond the fire. Davis' nerves became as tautened wire. Into the circle of light came an ebony woman with the form

of a Venus and the face of a human beast.

"Maman Lou! Maman Lou! Maman Lou!"

A weird moaning cry, thrice repeated. Greetings to the priestess of the serpent!

The woman began to dance, first a slow movement of the body from the hips upward, not without a certain grace. The blacks moaned and touched their heads to the ground. The woman, weaving here and there like an upright serpent, began to glide into the terrible spirit of the dance. Her bodily postures now expressed the lowest meanings of sensuality, low enough in truth, yet she had just begun. The brain behind that black skull must have crawled with devilish vermin. Her movements were the acme of obscenity. The lust of the beast is clean because it is natural. The natural emotion of man is clean because it is sacred. But the lust expressed in the dance of the *Maman Lou* was the lust of a man or woman for a beast—horrible, revolting, inexpressible in words. As she worked herself into a frenzy a sort of froth came to her lips, and her eyes rolled until one could see the dead white of them. She seemed to be possessed of serpents that crawled within her bosom, causing her to writhe with their writhing. In her frenzy, which the devotees began to share, she tore her thin clothing from her body, standing naked in the firelight and writhing still in the ghastly contortions of the dance. She fell to the ground at last, as if taken suddenly with catalepsy. When her bare feet fell into the fire she seemed not to notice.

Heads were raised and another wail went forth.

"Papa Lou! Papa Lou! Papa Lou!"

The priest came forth with the sacrifice! A goat without horns! A nude girl of sixteen or so, black as midnight, so stupefied with some sort of drug that she knew not whither she went, nor cared what became of her. Then Davis noticed several other things. The priest, his face hidden by a mask fashioned after a serpent's head, carried a red book in his hand. There was a round stone near the fire. The ground near the circle of devotees was covered with sawdust.

When the *Papa Lou* threw the girl upon the ground and opened the great vein in her neck, she made no sound. Only her eyes moved as do those of a stricken bull. The priest caught the blood in a vessel, dipped his fingers in it, and with the precise flicking movement of long practise made a perfect cross of crimson in the sawdust. Three drops he let fall upon the holy stone, three drops he used to anoint the book which he carried in his hand.

There was a different timbre in the moaning of the devotees. Louder, more malevolent, demanding that the ceremony proceed with greater speed. The priest, a butcher in the guise of a serpent, began his work. But why follow? Davis saw revolting black lips become dyed with crimson, saw terrible trophies in the hands of the devotees, trophies that had once been part of a fellow being. When the trophies disappeared there was nothing but clean white bones, and a circle of beasts that had gorged themselves.

The ceremony proceeded to its inevitable conclusion, as if there were no depth to the filth into which the devotees might plunge themselves. Men and women, one with the other, forced themselves far, far down below the level of the beasts—in the name of the most terrible religion in all the world.

Davis wondered if Hepner had been poisoned before he had been tortured,

and hoped that such had been the case. Better all around for Hepner.

Davis looked up. The priest with the serpent's mask stood before him.

"I am Cerimarie Sam." he said. "Who are you?"

There was a threat in the voice that told Davis he had been found out. He looked around the circle before replying. He came to his feet with a leap that carried him atop the monster, this beast in human guise that murdered children; who had children by whatsoever woman he desired and attended none of them; who had even offered some of these children, on occasion, as sacrifices to the serpent. The devotees were too far gone in their beastliness to notice what took place. It was only at dawn that they missed their high priest. He had disappeared from among them.

TWO WEEKS later Davis reported back to his commanding officer, who would have had him thrown out of the office as a dirty nigger had the C. O. not heard English words on the black man's lips. After the greetings were over the C. O. asked:

"And what of Cerimarie Sam?"

"Very strange about him, sir," replied Davis coldly. "I found him all right, but someone had literally skinned him alive, added to which the poor fellow had been thrown over a cliff and mashed beyond all human resemblance!"

"Oh, by the way, sir," he said as he turned to leave the office, "I also learned the identity of Cerimarie Sam, and it is my duty to inform you that the district of San Pierre has lost a valuable senator!"

"Luisma's Return," another powerful Haitian tale by Estil Critchie, will be published next month. It deals with the crimes of Henri I, Emperor of the North, who marched a whole company of soldiers over a high cliff to prove to a visiting minister that his discipline was iron-bound.

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The HOUSE of DUST

A Mystery Serial by L·A·BORAH

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

LAMONT HOUSE, near the little Louisiana town of Crawford, has been untenanted for twenty years, since the mysterious murder of Cassius Lamont took place there. Village superstition says that the gloomy old mansion is the abode of ghosts and hants.

Jarrell Lamont, son of the murdered man, wants his bride to meet his sister Elise, and thinks it will be a lark to have the meeting in Lamont House. Sending Weems, his butler, ahead to put the house in order, he telegraphs Elise to meet him and his bride there.

Kirk Hayward, a young doctor and boyhood friend of her brother, drives Elise to Lamont House through a severe rain. A shaft of light is seen for a minute shining from one of the windows of the house, so Elise bids goodbye to the doctor and sends him back to the village.

Elise finds nothing but dust in the house —thick, clinging layers of it. Setting her black traveling bag on the floor in the hall, she starts to go up the stairs, when she sees on the railing the fresh imprint of a human hand. She goes back to get her traveling bag to return to the village, but it has disappeared. Bewildered, she returns to the stairs, and finds that the imprint of the mysterious hand has disappeared, and the dust is as thick and even on the railing as if it had never been touched. Terrified, the girl stumbles wild-eyed out into the storm.

Dr. Hayward, hearing the hysterical girl's story at the inn, decides to investigate, and races out to Lamont House in his car. He finds in an upper hallway the faint half print of a naked foot. He searches the rooms, and when he returns to the hallway the footprint is gone! Overcome by the drowsy heaviness of the air, he falls asleep, sitting on the stairs. He is awakened by a blood-chilling scream, which sounds twice and ends in a horrible, bubbling gurgle. Hayward rushes to the end of the hall; a pencil of greenish light flashes across the corridor; a knife whirs past his head and strikes quivering into the window casing; and a door crashes shut.

Finding the door locked, he puts his eye to the keyhole. By the ghastly glow of a green-shaded lamp, he sees a man tilted grotesquely backward on a chair, dead from a welling gash across the throat. Smashing the panels of the door, Dr. Hayward stumbles into the room and falls against the body of the murdered man. As he staggers to his feet he catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror, and beside his own image appears for a second another. It is the face of Elise Lamont, and her hands clutch a knife!

Elise, at the inn, has awakened from a terrible dream, and she thinks the dream is a message that her brother Jarrell is in danger. She has dressed and gone out into the storm again, determined to warn her brother if he really is in Lamont House. As she goes into the corridor upstairs, she finds in the window sill the knife that has been thrown at Hayward. She takes it into her hands, and at the end of the corridor she sees an almost unbelievable scene: the dead man tilted back in his chair with a gaping cut across his throat, while over him, one hand raised as if to strike, and a streak of blood across his white face, stands Kirk Hayward! Screaming, she flings the knife from her and rushes out into the storm. Dr. Hayward tries to follow her, but she eludes him. He returns to the house, but the murdered man has disappeared, and a gray film of dust is over every square inch of the room.

At 3 o'clock in the morning, Bill Joy, returning from "setting up" with Katie Barnes, his Pine Township sweetheart, finds in Pine Lake the body of a murdered man, whose throat is slit from ear to ear. He brings to the village of Crawford the news of Pine Township's first mysterious murder since the death of Cassius Lamont a score of years before.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CRAWFORD POSSE

THE SUN was just clearing the tree tops when old Joy dragged the exhausted Bill up the front steps of Constable Clem Withersbee's house and pounded peremptorily on the door. The old man had been pumping Bill on the way; and by dint of honeyed cajolery, fearsome threats, and a liberal discounting of the exaggerations due to his son's perfervid imagination, he had arrived at some inkling of what the young adventurer had really seen. Hence the noisy summons.

After beating on the door at intervals for ten minutes or more, the old man finally succeeded in arousing Constable Clem. The officer poked his head sleepily from a second-story window to inquire "what in the name of the great horn spoon" was the matter.

"Matteh enough," replied the old man. "Reckon yo-all betteh awganize a poss' an' go out to Pine Lake. Bill, hyar, hez run onto a-a-nutheh jest like the killin' o' ol' Cash Lamont back in the arly nineties!"

Constable Clem stared open-mouthed, first at the old man, and then at the apparition that was Bill.

"Yo cain't be a-meanin' it", he gasped finally. "Anotheh killin'? I'll be right daown as soon as I kin git my jeans on. Yo-all go oveh an' pound the fiah alahm, an' we'll have the hull taown out to help in consid'ble less'n no time."

Old man Joy seized the shrinking Bill by his hand.

"Come awn, son," he drawled; and away went the two of them to sound the rusty wagon tire that served Crawford as a village tocsin.

In an almost unbelievably short time, considering the earliness of the hour, half the male population of the little town was gathered in Trumbull's store listening to Bill's story of his wild night. As for Bill, he was in the very heyday of his glory. Gone was his feeling of overpowering fatigue. His chest swelled fatly. Despite the loss of the pristine loveliness that had been his the night before, he was the hero of the hour. Draping himself chastely behind an open-work chair, he performed wonders of narration. He painted with lurid language the nocturnal horrors he had experienced. He did himself and his own daredeviltry fairly proud.

Constable Clem Withersbee got to the store just in time to hear Bill's climax.

"An' there they was," the narrator almost hissed, "ten of 'em, skelped an' their throats cut, a-layin' in the water an' a-bleedin' so the hull lake was gittin' red. My Gawd, men, I tell you, it was suhtainly awful. They—"

"Who done tol' yo' a dead body could bleed?" interrupted Constable Clem harshly. "You'd bettah git home an' putt on some pants afore the women see you. Them britches is sorter low cut in the back to be exackly deecorus."

Like a wild fowl brought down from full flight, Bill subsided flutteringly and began to take a red and rueful inventory of his damaged finery. He was indeed a sight such as no modest girl should behold. With chagrin and sorrow he surveyed the wreck of the outfit for which he had paid twelve dollars and ninety-eight cents.

"I want the last livin' one of you hyar as soon as yo-all kin git hyar with double barr'led shotguns," ordered the constable. "An' one o' you betteh go afteh a doctah. Git Doc Satterslee, the hoss leech; we gotta have a medical pusson o' some sort an' we doan' want that young smaht Alick of a Haywahd. Now git a-goin', all of you, kase we-uns leave hyar fo' that massacree place in just five minutes."

At the tone of command, the group of men showed some signs of life. They had been lulled almost to sleep by Bill's weird tale, and the constable's voice aroused them. Some started for their homes to procure weapons. Others held back with timorous and patently specious pleas of business.

"I doan' callate to lissen to no excuses. Yo-all kin come or take the consequences," shouted Constable Clem; and objections ceased.

The posse formed in the street in a very short space of time—twelve doughty heroes, armed with everything from a sawed-off double-barreled shotgun to a pitchfork, the constable and old Joy at their head.

While the ranks were forming, a somewhat peculiar incident occurred. Old Man Joy bethought him of the necessity of taking Bill along for a guide. He looked around for his son, but failed to see him among the crowd. Then he glanced up the street just in time to see the intrepid teller of tales scuttling around a corner toward home.

"You, Bill," the old man shouted, "come back hyar an' show this yere poss' whar you seen them army o' massacreed folks."

Bill, trembling in every fiber, came back perforce.

"I ain't fitten to be seen nohow," he quavered. "I figgered I'd jest go home an' let yo-all—"

Constable Clem snorted.

"You air uncommon modest all of a sudden, ain't you? Seems to me you wasn't puhtickler how you showed yourself when you was deescribin' thet thar holy-cost. Git hyar at the front."

With pitiful reluctance Bill obeyed, and began a slow and painful retracing of the journey he had done at such breakneck speed only a few hours before.

The posse found marks of Bill's flight everywhere along the trail. In one place the ground had been clawed up as if by some death struggle; in another spot a broken fence proclaimed that Bill had been in too much of a hurry to stop at ordinary obstacles. His missing shoe was discovered sticking in a particularly gummy mud puddle. A fragment of his plaid trousers clung to a sharp splinter on a broken stump. Near the cemetery was found the source of the maniacal laugh that had sent the hero flying from the democrat wagon. Jackson's old mule, his tether wound tight around a tree, stood braying plaintively for release. By the time they had reached the lake, most of the crowd were inclined to doubt the entire story of the murder. Nevertheless the constable urged them on.

"We may find somethin' yit," he said, "an' we'll look fer it. They's an ox or mule in the wateh, mebbe. I cain't believe any ordinary thing could move Bill Joy as fast as he must of went last night."

After a good deal of beating about in the underbrush near the lake, they stumbled on the scene of Bill's first terror, the place where old Dock had balked.

His teeth chattering, the luckless youth pointed toward the high bank.

"It's a-layin' in the water jest below the pint there," he stuttered. "Right thar's whar ol' Dock done stopped to rest."

Constable Clem climbed to the top of the bank and peered over its edge. At first he saw nothing unusual; then suddenly he started back with an inarticulate exclamation. He turned and fairly jumped toward the others.

"My Gawd," he cried, "it's true; they's a murdered man a-layin' on them rocks down thar in the aidge of the water. I seed him plain."

The men cast furtive glances in the direction of the lake. Nobody seemed eager to verify the officer's statement.

"Let's all git down to the shore by the path yonder," Old Man Joy finally suggested.

None too promptly, they formed in line and began the descent of the cliff. They scrambled down the path to the rugged beach and after some difficult going among the rocks made their way slowly around to the point where the high bank overhung the breakers. There, sure enough, they came upon the half-submerged body of an old man.

THE corpse lay just as Bill had seen it the night before, the grim plaything of the waves. A reddish smear lay across the white shirt-bosom. In the eddying swirls of the lake the white hair rippled snakily. The horrid gash across the throat gaped weirdly like an accusing mouth. In all the posse, not a man looked upon that gruesome find without a shudder. Constable Clem alone had sufficient courage to approach the cadaver.

He stooped and touched the awful thing gingerly.

"It's a job for the coroner," he said. "I reckon there wan't no use o' gittin' Doc Satterslee. We'll have to let the body alone till the coroner gits hyar."

He looked over the posse.

"A couple of you stay hyar to watch an' the rest of us'll look around to see if we kin find a clue," he decided.

None of the gang seemed anxious to be the watchers; so the constable appointed two, Jeffer Turlinghame and Postmaster Blaine Murchison. The others he led back up the cliff. Here the party divided into two groups and made a thorough search of the neighborhood.

Finding nothing suspicious, they were about to give up the quest and return to Crawford, when Old Man Joy, who had wandered beyond his companions, hallooed from a clump of alder-bushes about a hundred yards from Lamont House.

"Come oveh hyar," the old fellow shouted. "I've done found the tracks of an automobile."

The posse hurried to the scene. Sure enough, there were the unmistakable marks of rubber tires. Better still, there were well-defined tracks leading away from the clump of bushes.

"The only thing to do," said the constable, "is to follow up this cyar. It may lead to somethin'. So far as I know, they's only one gas wagon in our taown. Yo-all know as well as I do who owns that."

The men nodded in tacit acceptance of the officer's suspicions. They gripped their weapons firmly and followed their leader along the clean-cut trail left by the wheels.

It was Bill, who had recovered his aplomb at the proof of his veracity and was now stepping out as boldly as any other of the party, who first noticed a peculiar cross-mark appearing at regular intervals in one of the wheel tracks. He directed the constable's attention to his discovery.

"Hain't that cyar we-all know got a taped place on one hind tire that would make a mark like that?" he asked.

Constable Clem thought a moment. "Now that you mention it, Bill, I believe it has," he agreed. "I shot a hole in that tire the last time I arrested the driver fer breakin' the new five-mile speed law. You certainly have a powerful mem'ry, youngster."

Bill, delighted at this praise, almost purred his content. The party moved steadily along the road. When they reached Pine Tree Inn, they found Tab Shepard at the gate waiting for them.

"H'are you?" called the innkeeper. "Reckon suthin' considable quar must o' happened, eh? Mought as well come in an' set an' tell us all about it."

Constable Clem stepped close to Tab, lowered his voice to a stage whis-

per, and answered, "Keep it quiet, Tab, but they's been anotheh murder out to Lamont House 'most like the one twenty yeahs ago. We-uns is a-trackin' the no-'count rascal what done it. We callate he got away in the cyar that made them thar tracks."

Tab looked at the wheel ruts indicated.

"Doctah Haywahd," he drawled significantly, "was in hyar last night. He come in jest afteh it stahted storm-in' an' stood a weavin' back an' fo'th in front of the grate; an' once he made like to staht out agin'.

"While he was hyar, a girl done come runnin' up onto the veranda and bust in onto us, a-faintin' and a-fallin' right into the doctah's ahms. She tol' a story in a gaspy way about nobody bein' to hum an' about the dust crawlin' on the stair rail. I couldn't make head nor tail to it; neither could Esmerelda.

"But Haywahd, he jest give us ordehs to putt the gal to bed, an' he flung out of the house an' into his automobile, an' drove off up the road as fast as he could. That was the last I seed of him, but I hearn a cyar goin' by toward town 'bout one o'clock."

Constable Clem turned triumphantly to his followers.

"Heah that, men!" he exclaimed. "We-uns betteh hurry, I reckon, or our precious rascal may git away from us. Come along, Tab."

And without more ado, he urged his entire party along the tell-tale track of the car.

As they had expected, the trail led them directly to Doctor Hayward's new garage, and the car was inside the building. Without hesitancy they went to the doctor's house and began beating on the door. In a moment the doctor's servant opened the door. The posse pushed him aside and went in.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JARRELL'S STORY

THE sound of voices beyond the chintz-curtained windows aroused Elise Lamont about nine o'clock the morning after her adventures in the deserted house, and she crept from the netting screen of her bed to peer out at the speakers whose excited tones had broken in upon her slumber.

A score of ill-kempt men crowded the little yard before the inn—rough men armed with every imaginable variety of weapon. Every hue of complexion was there, and the expressions upon the mottled faces were laughable at first glance, until she realized that they mirrored every emotion from unreasoning terror to unrelenting hatred and lust for blood. In the group near the gate she recognized the ungainly figure of the host of the inn, and she caught his query as to the purport of the expedition.

Before Constable Clem could frame a reply, there flashed upon the girl's intuitive mind the only possible explanation. From out the chaos of that night of horror, scene upon scene came tumbling; she saw the blackness through which she climbed inky stairs and made her way along the chasm of a black hall toward a beam of greenish light. She felt again the gripping terror she had known when she peered through the broken door into that dread room where Kirk Hayward stood over the body of the murdered man. Phantasmagoric it seemed, yet she knew too well how actual it was. She heard the words nothing could have dragged from her uttered by the garrulous Tab a moment later, and she knew that the inevitable was about to follow, that Hayward would be arrested.

She was powerless to help the young doctor. To attempt a denial of the facts would be foolhardy and could end only in involving her. If she was to do anything for the man who she

was convinced, had done murder for her sake, she must keep herself free from taint of suspicion.

Perhaps the villagers might not be able to prove anything against Hayward, she thought, and she clutched at the idea with the eagerness of a drowning man toward a spar. Such things happened often, she knew. Or perhaps Hayward might admit the crime and escape the penalty by a plea of self-defense. She discarded this hope a moment later, however, when she realized that a man does not cut another's throat in self-defense.

The crowd moved on, noisily discussing the importance of Tab's contribution to the evidence against the "upstart of a young doctor." Elise saw Tab start for the house and a moment later heard his excited voice breaking the news to Esmerelda.

Esmerelda brought Elise's breakfast to her room and for thirty minutes regaled her with details concerning a "gran' lady from N'Oleans" who had stayed at the inn a few weeks before. But Elise heeded little of what was said. Suspiciously fearful that her excursion of the night before had been discovered, and dreading the questions which might be asked, she watched covertly for some gleam of the woman's eye which would tell that this garrulousness was merely assumed to mask a cunning which would uncover her secret. But there was nothing.

The breakfast finished, the tray was removed, and Esmerelda hastened toward the chair upon which the girl's clothing had been hung to dry after Tab had cleaned it the night before. As Elise noticed her hostess' intention, she froze with apprehension; but she gasped with relief a moment later.

Esmerelda halted, arms akimbo, at sight of the heap of mud-stained and bedraggled garments. Gingerly she touched them, examining in some detail the streaks of mud and clay.

"So that's it, eh? I'll have a word or two with that husband of mine later in the mornin'. It's a pretty bit of cleanin' he done on these clothes of yours, the lazy houn'. I gottuh apologize fer him, I reckon. Still," examining the skirt closely, "I reckon he got the worst of it off at that. This'll brush off."

Lest Esmerelda suspect the truth, Elise hastened to assure her that she wouldn't think of troubling Mr. Shepard further.

"Trouble!" Esmerelda snorted. "That Tab'll have plenty of trouble afore I get through with him, don' you worry. Now, honey, hop out of bed an' into these yere clothes."

Ten minutes later Elise was dressed and out in the main living room of the hostelry. Esmerelda, treating her more as a personal guest than as a patron, led her out into the little yard before the inn.

"These fall flowers ain't doin' like I lowed they orto," she explained, indicating some sickly plants beneath the windows. "I was wonderin' ef you'd be willin' to tell me what's the matter on 'em."

Followed an hour of horticulture interspersed with local gossip; but there was no word of that which was most on the girl's mind, the newly discovered murder. To Elise the omission seemed ominous.

She arose at length from kneeling beside the scraggly flower beds and walked out to the gate. The morning was beautiful, for October was in the air, and the spicy odor of pines. Across the road and fifty feet beyond, the lake stretched sparkling under the shimmering sky. She marveled that the storm had left so little trace of its violence.

SUDDENLY from down the road toward Crawford came the purr of a heavy motor. Elise was interested at once. She had gathered from the conversation of the doughty posse that

Kirk Hayward possessed the only motor car in the village. Could it be possible that—?

The car rounded a bend in the muddy road and came into full view. She would have known the big green machine anywhere, even without the tall, well-built figure behind the wheel. She dashed out into the middle of the road and flung up a hand in command to halt. Brakes screaked and the car slowed to a stop. The man behind the wheel got out with a joyful exclamation and clasped Elise in his arms, to the very evident dismay of a young woman seated in the automobile.

"Why, Sis!"

"Oh, Jarrell, I thought you never would come!"

The severe expression left the face of the girl in the car. Elise buried her nose in her brother's coat and proceeded to weep for joy.

Tears could not prevail for long however, for Jarrell dragged his sister to the step of the machine and introduced to her the new Mrs. Lamont. He acted like a child with a new toy, for Caroline Lamont was good to look upon, even in the eyes of her husband's sister. She presented a striking contrast to the fay-like Elise, for she was tall and lithe with the graceful sweep of long muscles. Her features were regular, and hazel eyes smiled with a hint of mischief from under a mass of smoothly coiled hair that glinted like spun gold in the sunshine. Elise liked her instantly.

For a few moments the three chatted gaily; then Jarrell drove the car to the inn entrance and they entered the domain of Tab and Esmerelda. Tab came out and writhed his hands and stroked his walrus mustaches. Esmerelda came from the flower beds, wiping her hands on her apron. Elise explained the invasion.

"Could the travelers get something to eat? They sartin could"; and Tab was forthwith dragged off to the kitchen that the meal might be hastened.

While they waited, Jarrell opened a subject which Elise had been dreading, for it seemed to call for a relation of the happenings of the previous night, which she was by no means ready to give. He took up the matter of her arrival before him.

"What I don't understand, Sis," he said, "is how you happened to be here this morning. I wrote you—"

"You wrote me to come Tuesday the nineteenth, on the train that gets here about seven o'clock in the evening. And yesterday was Tuesday."

Jarrell laughed.

"Yes, but it was Tuesday the eighteenth. It was probably my mistake in the day of the week. It's lucky you stopped here instead of going on to the old house. You wouldn't have found anybody there but old Weems, and if it stormed here as it did where we were, last night was not one to spend in a place like that with only a feeble old servant for company."

Elise shuddered, but managed a weak smile. She knew too well what last night in Lamont House meant.

"I was rather disappointed," she said after a moment, "when I didn't find you at the station, but a machine brought me this far, and Mr. and Mrs. Shepard have been very kind."

She changed the subject abruptly by putting a question she had been puzzling over ever since she had received Jarrell's letter.

"Just why did you decide to spend your honeymoon at Lamont House, Jarrell? You know as well as I that nobody has been near it for years, and it must be positively filthy with dust Brrr!"

The reality of her shudder escaped Jarrell, who glanced at Caroline before answering the question.

"Shall we tell her?" he asked.

Caroline smiled mysteriously and nodded.

"It's a bit of a lark," began Jarrell, "a treasure trove excursion, if you please, with more promise of success than is to be found in the average enterprize of the sort. That's one reason why I wanted you along. I never shall forget how you and I used to play pirate in Aunt Ellen's old attic and find vast fortunes in those old horse-hair trunks. So when Caroline and I started out in search of hidden wealth, we made up our minds to ask you to come along."

"That was kind of you," laughed Elise. "Go on with the wild tale, please."

"Well," continued Jarrell, "it all goes back to the days when we were kids in the old house at the end of the lake. Neither of us can remember much of father. My recollection is a little clearer perhaps than yours, but even I have only a dim memory of him as a tall, rugged man with gray eyes like yours and a skin tanned to the color of copper from his long travels among the Mexican Cordilleras.

"I can just remember his return from his last trip and the atmosphere of excitement that hung about the old place just after he got back. He was tremendously wrought up over something and rushed about getting ready for another journey to the Aztec country.

"But before he could go—Well, you remember what happened. I can still see that gaping cut across his throat that stared at me when I rushed into his den the morning after the murder."

He paused for a moment, for Elise had grown ghastly pale.

"After it was all over, you and I were taken to Aunt Ellen Blakely. She took us in and mothered us as if we had been her own children, for she had promised mother to look after us when mother died.

"Just where the money with which we were clothed and educated came from never bothered me much until a year ago. I was certainly surprized to discover then that it had been realized upon a part of a great treasure that Dad had brought back from some crypt in Mexico. The treasure was in the form of jewels, and particularly great rubies; and Weems, who had been with Dad on his last trip, was the only person who knew where the stuff was.

"I made a search for Weems and found him, wizened and old, in a city over near the Mexican border. He received me as though I had been his own son; and when I asked him about the treasure, he told me something of its history. It had been the wealth of an Aztec temple. The tale of how Weems and Dad had made away with it would have furnished thrills for a dozen dime novels.

"They divided the booty, and it was understood that if Weems got his share home safely he was to have the proceeds of it. The portion Weems got totaled about one-fourth of the entire lot, he told me.

"On the way back, Weems and Dad got separated in their race with the Indians, and Dad got home first. He was killed before Weems reached Crawford. The tragedy of Dad's murder left everybody in the dark concerning the disposal Dad had made of his share of the Aztec hoard; but Weems is positive that the plunder was got home safely. The fact that Dad's share of the jewels was never found made us virtually paupers, or it would have if it hadn't been for Weems.

"During all the years we were at Aunt Ellen's home, Weems sent funds for our support from his share of the treasure, and when each of us became of age, the old fellow deposited twenty thousand dollars in a New Orleans bank to the credit of what we have thought of as the Lamont fortune. When I learned how the old

man had treated us, I felt like falling down and kissing his feet.

"But the strangest thing Weems told me was that the booty Dad got from the Aztec temple was lying around somewhere just waiting for us to dig it out. I quizzed him as best I could and he said he thought it likely that Dad had hidden the jewels here in Crawford in the old house. Weems was not certain of the truth of his supposition however, and so I decided to go down into the Mexican mountains to investigate the matter.

"It was to Mexico that Caroline and I went for our real honeymoon two months ago, but we found nothing for our pains but some very majestic scenery and some exceedingly peculiar people. There was one old voodoo, for instance, of whom I must tell you more some day. His name was Miedo, which in Spanish means fear, and he was aptly named. One had to get used to seeing snakes or lizards or almost anything else cold and clammy come crawling out of his filthy rags while one was talking to him. He seemed suspicious of us, and waxed unnecessarily inquisitive about our business. I even found him snooping around our cabin one afternoon when I came home unexpectedly from a hike in the mountains.

"Since we had no luck in Mexico, Caroline and I decided to come back here for the final search. Weems had been so certain that the treasure had been hidden away here somewhere that I wired him to meet us here, or rather to come ahead and make a part of the house at least fit for occupancy. This I wrote you about. Now it's up to us to pound walls and explore crevices until we find that mass of plunder. Weems estimates its value at perhaps a million dollars."

"A pursuit of a million!"

Elise gasped at the thought of the amount they were to hunt for in the old house. Then a startling thought came to her. Might not this tale which Jarrell had told account logically for that mysterious presence in those rooms of dust and dread? Could Weems have anticipated the arrival of Jarrell and instituted a search on his own account for the glistening hoard? Could Weems have been the one whose fingers had left their marks on the dust-laden stair rails? The train of reasoning stopped abruptly. Weems might have made the marks, but how could he have covered them up within the next ten minutes and why should he wish to frighten her? She reflected that Weems had supported both her and Jarrell out of his own wealth. He was above suspicion.

Another suspicion came to her mind. She was reluctant to consider it, but it would not down. She remembered the picture she had seen through the broken door, Kirk Hayward standing over the body of a murdered man. The significance of all her previous suspicions of Kirk increased tenfold as she went over the events of the night again in the light of Jarrell's disclosures. Suppose Kirk had gone to that upper room, and had found Weems there with the treasure just discovered! Cupidity was a powerful motive, she knew, and the killing of the old man would make the theft of the gems easy. It all looked damning for Hayward, but somehow she couldn't believe him capable of a crime.

Jarrell's mention of Miedo, the Aztec priest, opened another field for conjecture. She wondered whether it would be possible for one of those medicine men to follow a trail to Louisiana. She was forced to dismiss the thought as utterly preposterous, and yet she could not help thinking of the unsolved mystery of her father's murder twenty years before. Neither Hayward nor Weems could have had a hand in that.

During the time which the newlyweds spent over their luncheon, Elise weighed the strange problem, but she

could make nothing of it. She finally determined to continue her policy of complete silence with regard to her own experience. Perhaps the day might bring to light something definite.

"Jarrell," she said as the meal ended, "perhaps Mrs. Shepard can recommend some woman from the village to act as our housekeeper at the Lamont Place. You seem to have overlooked the necessity of such a helper."

The suggestion was thrown in to prevent any possible remarks of Esmerelda or Tab that might lead to embarrassing questions about the night before.

Jarrell proposed the matter to the innkeeper's wife, when Esmerelda came in to clear away the dishes and at the woman's reply Elise felt her throat tighten with fear lest her secret leak out.

"Well," began Mrs. Shepard. "after the goin's on at that Lamont Place, I dunno as anybody will be willin' to stay there. I'll do all I can, but you know when dead folks has been found around a place, it ain't all live folks as—"

Jarrell interrupted in time to save the situation.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Shepard," he said, "I know all about the reputation my old home has in the neighborhood. If you can get us a housekeeper who isn't afraid of spooks or hants, we'll be glad to pay you well for the service."

Esmerelda looked at Jarrell queerly before replying, and Elise sat fairly shivering with suspense.

"Well," the woman finally got out, "the widow woman that lives down by the north point of the lake, Mrs. Whipple, might be willin' to work for you. She ain't afeard of hants, so she says."

Elise broke in quickly: "Mrs. Whipple will be just the person for the place, I'm sure, Mrs. Shepard. Thank you for the suggestion. You'll see to getting her, won't you?"

Again Esmerelda looked queerly at Jarrell; but she only nodded her assent to Elise's proposal and went back to the kitchen.

Elise breathed a sigh of relief. The crisis had passed.

CHAPTER NINE

"THE CORPSE IS UP"

HAYWARD sat on the edge of the rickety wooden bed in the coop that served Crawford in the several capacities of calaboose, pest house, and morgue. Fervently he cursed his luck. Then he began at the beginning and cursed some more, with particular attention this time to the stupidity of Constable Clem Withersbee, the grannyish garrulity of Tab Shepard, and the unmitigated asininity of Bill Joy. Altogether he swore with fair fluency for a normally mild-mannered, polite young physician. But none was there to point the finger of shame.

Up and down the muddy path that led past the prison house stalked the redoubtable Constable Clem, his rubber boots sinking soddenly into the mire, to come free with doleful, sucking sounds. There was hardly room for the patrol within the coop; besides, the grisly remains of the murdered man had been "laid out" in the room adjoining the young doctor's cell, and the constable had never hankered much to be around dead folks. For comparative privacy the prisoner had to thank the necessity that combined Crawford's morgue with its jail.

Up and down, up and down, up and down, slopped the grim sentinel. His fireman's hat and oilskin "slicker" whished past the barred window of the cell with the regularity of a pendulum. At first Hayward had tried to engage him in conversation, to inquire the cause of his arrest, but the jailer's only reply had been, "Keerful what you-all say; I'll use it again

you." Finally Hayward had given up seeking information.

Several hours had passed since the incarceration. During that time nothing very startling had taken place. At noon several quaking villagers had carried in the corpse of the murdered man and, directed by Satterslee, the veterinarian, had placed it conspicuously on a table near the cell door. One or two of the delegation had indulged the small-town tendency to taunt the suspect; but his contemptuous silence had soon proved too much for them, and they had left disgruntled. He had been obliged to argue with his keeper for twenty minutes before he could gain permission to eat the dinner brought to him by his negro body servant. Crawford's police force was highly technical in its methods of procedure.

As the afternoon wore on, a riot of confusing thoughts whirled through Hayward's mind. What had been in the old house? What agency had been behind the horrible crime? What means had been used to remove from the den not only the corpse, but every trace of the killing? What could have brought Elise Lamont back to the place from which she had fled in unreasoning terror only a few hours before? Above all else, what had been the girl's connection with the crime?

Had she been cornered and forced to commit this murder to save her life, or had she done the dreadful deed with deliberate intent? The evidence of that horrible reflection of her in the mirror as she stood there in the doorway with the bloody knife in her hand seemed to point to Elise as the guilty person; but the young man could not bring himself to accuse her. A vision of her appealing face with its soft contours, her wistful gray eyes, her brave, open smile kept coming before him to drive away his suspicions of her. He realized that in the short space of that evening ride she had become very dear to him. He swore to go to any length rather than permit her to become implicated in the murder case.

Turning at length from the mystery of the killing, his thoughts went to the flight of the girl. He wondered where she had gone. Perhaps even now she was in that house of crawling dust, a prey to the horror, the creeping dread, the breathing blackness. A strong shudder went over him at the thought. Elise might be enduring any one of a hundred nameless agonies while he sat powerless, closely guarded by the person whom he considered the stupidest dolt in fooldom. Even now, he thought, the winsome little beauty he had come overnight to love might be facing death with nobody near to protect her, and all because the ignorant Crawford populace had hunted him down and imprisoned him in this isolated chicken coop. Wrath choked him; he sprang up and paced his narrow cage in fury.

He determined right there to break jail as soon as darkness came on. He had been arrested and thrown into this comic opera dungeon without a warrant and without one jot of reasonable evidence. That fact would justify an attempt on his part to escape. The flight of Elise, the necessity of solving the mystery of the old house—a score of reasons made his getting out imperative.

Calmed somewhat by his decision, he returned to his seat on the complaining bed. He even smiled a little to himself at the thought of the important air "Doc" Satterslee had put on when the corpse had been brought into the jail. Only a week before the "doctor" had diagnosed as smallpox a case of hives and confined in this very place a luckless tramp who had fallen into his clutches. The sight of that sheeted thing in the next room brought diverting thoughts not only of "Doc" Satterslee, but of the other superstitious villagers as well and, best of all, of Bill Joy. He had heard

snatches of Bill's story on the way to the jail. Truly the prospect of befooling these ignorant crackers held forth some promise of pleasure.

With a deal of conjecture and planning on ways and means of escape, he spent the time till dusk. About seven o'clock came his negro with supper. At this time, too, he was relieved to note that Constable Withersbee gave over his job as warden to old Blaine Murchison, the postmaster. The negro, trembling all over for fear of the corpse, backed out of the jail, and left his master in charge of his new jailer.

THE postmaster proved more communicative than his predecessor. Indeed he seemed rather to prefer the inside of the chamber of death, with Hayward as a companion, to the fearful shadows and clinging mud of the path. The calaboose, on account of its other use as a pest house, had been built some three quarters of a mile from the corporation line. It stood half-way between the village and the lake in a low, swampy place, the haunt of a million doleful frogs. By the superstitious it might easily be regarded as a region inhabited by all manner of weird, supernatural beings. The unhallowed situation was too much for the new guard.

"It's an orful bad night," he vouchsafed by way of overture, seating himself on a camp stool as close as possible to Hayward's cell door, and at the greatest measurable distance from the body. "I dunno as I ever see a wuss night fer agey. My back's beginnin' to ache a'ready."

Hayward expressed concern.

"Are you subject to malaria?" he inquired innocently.

"Am I what? I reckon there hain't no man in Loosianny as has suffered more'n what I've done. It's left me with rheumatiz so bad I cain't hardly tote the mail down to the train mornin's."

A plan was assuming definite shape in Hayward's mind.

"Let me see your back," he suggested. "I know considerable about ague and rheumatism. Perhaps I can help you."

The guard was plainly tempted.

"I ain't s'posed to say nothin' to you," he objected. "But I dunno's it'll make sech a heap of difference. Constable Clem warn't no need bein' so puhticlah."

"I'm not dangerous, I can assure you," the doctor encouraged him. "If you have symptoms of an attack of swamp-fever, I think I can tell you how to ward it off; that is, provided you'll let me."

"I've hearn tell as how you cured ol' Miss Liza Danner of the agey. Co'se I nevah took so much stock in it; but yit—"

"What are your symptoms?"

"Eh?"

"How do you feel?"

"Waal," scratching his head, "when I come up hyar tonight, I felt so-sort o' shaky all oveh; specially up an' down the back."

Hayward laughed.

"Just what I suspected. You had the symptom known as *pedes frigidi*. If you'll come in here, I can fix you up in a minute."

He pretended a start.

"By Jove, that thing gave me a turn. I imagined the sheet over the corpse moved."

That was enough; Postmaster Murchison could not get the door to the cell open quickly enough to satisfy his eagerness for haste. He hurried over to Hayward's side like a frightened child to its mother's skirts.

Hayward pretended great interest in the case of "agey"

"Now just where do you feel the pain?" he asked, turning the old man around so that his back was toward the cell door.

"Right down thar," came the ready reply, as a shaking hand indicated the

vicinity of the spine just above the waistline.

"We'll have it all right in a minute, Mr. Murchison. Just let me get this shirt up a bit."

Then began a laughable performance. Hayward started to work the red flannel, ague-proof shirt up over the old man's skinny back. He pushed it all the way up to the shoulder blades; then he let it slip back.

"It won't stay up," he said. "Guess we'd better take it off."

And before his guard could object, he jerked the tough cloth up over the shoulders so that it pinioned the arms tightly.

"Hyar, what th'—"

But the old postmaster's complaint was uttered uselessly. Hayward had the keys from the warden's belt, was out of the cell, and was unbolting the outside door.

"Run for your life," he fairly screamed. "The corpse is up!"

But poor old Murchison could not run; he was too busy trying to extricate his head and arms from the thick folds of the red flannel shirt. In his frantic struggles he stumbled all over the cell. He knocked over and extinguished the kerosene lamp, slipped on the oily floor, and fell against the cell door, the clammy bars of which struck a horrid chill to his bare back. With a wild lurch, he plunged out into the room of dread. A squawk of pure terror strained his throat, and he thrashed about on the floor in a clawing scramble.

The shirt, buttoned tightly around his throat, was choking him. His breath came in stertorous gasps. To make matters worse, there came from the night outside such groans and wails and blood-curdling howls as only a warlock, or a banshee, or a hant, or a mischievous young man could make.

With a superhuman effort, the old man finally freed his head from its shameful bonds. But horrors! In his last jerk he struck the trestle which supported the table and brought the corpse down across his bare body.

Hayward, by this time, was a hundreds yards from the calaboose, securely hidden in a clump of bushes; it would have been difficult to find him. But the deputy jailer was not concerned with the whereabouts of his prisoner that had been. His one thought was to get away from the grisly specter that was wrestling with him. He broke from the jail and fled for the village, the red badge of his undoing fluttering in the breeze of his going.

The escaped prisoner watched the departure of his guard from a point of vantage, and he roared with laughter at the old fellow's antics. As soon as Murchison was out of sight, the jail breaker started along the Pine Lake road for Lamont House.

Only one person other than Hayward and Murchison was a witness to the escape. Bill Joy, who was just driving his mule team home from his father's field, where he had been picking corn, caught a good view of the supposed murderer as he left the calaboose. With a shriek, Bill left the wagon and made across lots for his own back door.

Long before Postmaster Blaine Murchison had dragged his weary feet back to the constable's house, the entire village of Crawford knew that "that murderin' young upstart of a doctor had bruk loose from jail."

CHAPTER TEN

THE BREATHING BLACK

THE matter of employing a housekeeper settled, Jarrell announced his intention of going over to Lamont House alone.

"I want to find out whether Weems has had the rooms put in order," he said. "While I'm gone, you girls can get acquainted. I'll not be long; I'll just look the place over, and if every-

thing is all right, I'll come back for you right away."

"Just like a man," Caroline laughed, "you have to take first chance to look for the treasure. I think you're mean. You'll go poking around all those mysterious, dusty old rooms and have all the fun of the first search to yourself."

Jarrell climbed into the car.

"I'll promise you not to spend any time this afternoon looking for the hidden wealth," he assured her. "We'll get settled in the old place before we start our investigations; then we'll do our treasure hunting together."

Waving good-bye, he drove away.

Left alone, the two girls had a long talk. They discovered that they had many acquaintances and many interests in common, and in a short time they became the best of friends. Indeed, so interesting was the conversation and so delightful the companionship, that for a time Elise almost forgot the suspicious dread that had oppressed her.

But as the afternoon wore on and Jarrell did not return, she grew nervous again and began to wonder whether anything could have happened to him in the old house in broad daylight. Three times she went to the gate to look for signs of his approach, and her relief was unspeakable when the big green car came in sight.

"Elise has been much more eager for your return than I," Caroline called out to her husband as he drove into the inn yard. "She has been out in the road looking for you until my nerves are in a perfect flutter. I hope you didn't meet with disappointment at the house."

"No, everything was all right," was the reply. "Weems had fixed up the servants' quarters according to my suggestion, and the rooms looked trim and cozy. We can go right out and take possession."

Elise felt strangely glad to learn that Jarrell had found nothing out of the ordinary; yet she was puzzled to explain the fact. She began to wonder again whether her experiences of the night before had not been dream figments.

"Was Weems glad to see you?" she asked Jarrell.

Jarrell looked up quickly.

"Why, no—"

He hesitated.

"The fact of it is I couldn't find Weems. He had the rooms in perfect order; there was even firewood on the hearth in the living room. But the old chap wasn't about. I was a bit puzzled at first, for I had written him to meet me at the train this afternoon. Then I remembered the mistake I made when I wrote to Elise. Weems has probably got the dates mixed up just as Sis did. I haven't a doubt he'll be on the job by nightfall."

At this mention of Weems' absence a suspicion that amounted to conviction came to Elise. She remembered with a sick feeling of horror that scene in the dust-laden den. She had caught only a glimpse of the corpse, but that glimpse had somehow impressed her that the dead man was old. The conclusion that the murdered man was Weems was most unwelcome, but it was almost impossible to avoid.

"Yes," she forced herself to say lightly, "you likely got Weems confused, too. I'm afraid your prospective treasure hunt made you altogether careless of details."

Jarrell laughed.

"Oh, come, Sis," he objected, "don't be too hard on a fellow. You and Caroline jump into the car with me, and I'll soon have you snug in the old house."

The girls called Esmerelda, who brought their bags, and they were soon on their way to Lamont House. Caroline and Jarrell talked delightedly of the expected treasure hunt,

and Elise put in a few words now and then to conceal her real feelings.

Daylight had wrought a wonderful improvement in the appearance of the old mansion. As they drove up to the porte-cochere at the side opposite the veranda of Elise's adventures, there was not a sign of the mystery and fearsomeness that had surrounded everything by night.

Jarrell stepped out of the car and ran up a flight of steps that led to the door. He swung open the heavy portal and rumbled in tones of sepulchral gravity, "Enter the only authentic haunted house in Louisiana."

Caroline laughed, and Elise joined in rather faintly. Jarrell handed them from the machine and bowed them into a well-lighted hall, from which they passed into a cheery living room that was warmed by a bright wood fire. Surely there was nothing awesome in this portion of Lamont House.

"I thought a little heat might be all right," said Jarrell, "so I lighted the wood Weems had provided. The bedrooms are beyond the double doors there. You'll find them just as comfortable as this."

The girls had soon explored the part of the house which had been prepared for their reception. As Jarrell had said, everything was in perfect order. There was absolutely no indication in this wing of anything mysterious or uncanny. Only the dark, heavy doors that barred the way to the unused rooms of the main building looked grimly forbidding and set Elise's nerves a-tingle.

Caroline was delighted with the place.

"Don't you just love it?" she asked. "I have always been simply fascinated by bolted doors. It is great fun to wonder what lies behind them."

"Yes," Elise agreed, "locked doors are usually very suggestive, particularly to people of an imaginative turn."

She could not repress a shiver. "Shall we go back to the fire? It's a little damp here." They went back to the living room.

THE afternoon seemed interminable to Elise. As the shadows lengthened, the atmosphere of occult mystery returned to the house. Even Caroline and Jarrell felt it. After wandering about the rooms a little while, Caroline lost some of her enthusiasm for exploration and came to sit with the others before the fire. The conversation lagged. Somehow plans for seeking the treasure ceased to be an attractive topic for discussion.

At six o'clock a great rattle and clatter along the driveway gave them all a start and brought them hurrying out of doors. Tab Shepard's man had just driven under the porte-cochere with the woman whom Esmerelda had engaged as cook for them. The fellow appeared to be in a dreadful hurry. It was amusing to see how quickly he got rid of his fare and left. Without waiting even long enough to receive his fee, he pounded off down the road at a rate that threatened to wreck his decrepit vehicle.

"A hant is the only thing on earth that could move a chap like that as fast as he is going," laughed Jarrell. He turned to the woman. "Your room is the third down the hall, Mrs. Whipple," he said. "Weems, our butler, is not here this afternoon, but he'll be back soon and will show you your duties."

The woman stared at Jarrell queerly. She was a heavy, dark person, almost Italian in appearance, and her gaze was peculiarly direct and penetrating.

"I don't think Mr. Weems will be here tonight," she said finally with sinister emphasis.

"Why, what do you know about him?" asked Elise, before Jarrell had time to say anything.

The woman turned toward the girls, eying them almost accusingly.

"Bill Joy found a dead man this mornin' in the lake below the high bank yonder," she said slowly. "The throat was cut from ear to ear. Some of us folks have lived here twenty years, and we knew the corpse for Cash Lamont's old butler. We recollected how somebody else was found. It's almighty queer about Weems dyin' the same way."

With a shrug she stooped and picked up her bags. Jarrell was the first to recover from the shock of the news. "Weems — murdered!" he gasped. "Tell me more about it, Mrs. Whipple. Is anybody suspected of the crime?"

The woman set down her belongings. Her taciturnity dropped from her in an instant. Evidently she had been only awaiting an invitation to tell what she knew. She began the story as though she enjoyed it immensely.

"The pore old man was found right in the edge of the water with his throat cut just like—just like—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Jarrell. "But who do the officers think is the murderer?"

"Oh, him?" she spoke as if a conviction was assured. "They've took young Doc Hayward for the killin'. I reckon he's guilty all right."

An involuntary cry escaped Elise, and Jarrell turned quickly toward her.

"Why, Sis, what's the matter? You're as white as a sheet."

Elise struggled for control.

"I'll be all right in a minute," she said. "My nerves are a little upset, I suppose. The shock was too much for me. Let's go into the house and have Mrs. Whipple tell us the particulars. Really I feel quite myself now."

She led the way to the living room.

On account of a heavy bank of clouds which had risen in the west, dusk was coming on exceptionally early. It was almost dark indoors.

Jarrell went into a room across the hall and returned with a big lamp, which he lighted and set on the mantel.

"There, that's much more cheerful," he said. "Now, Mrs. Whipple."

The woman settled herself comfortably in a chair near the fireplace and went into details. Her story was badly garbled, and parts of it were patently the product of her own imagination. However, she gave the main facts of the case as they had appeared to Constable Clem and the other villagers. In conclusion, she wove quite gratuitously a long rope to hang Kirk Hayward.

"This young doctor," she said, "has just got back here from college. He hain't been overly popular with folks hereabout for a long time. There is them as says he is practisin' voodoo. One thing sartin': he has cured a lot of chills an' fever in mighty queer ways, a-puttin' oil on the swamps an' sech like. Constable Clem Withersbee says he was covered with blood when he arrested him. This hain't goin' to be no mystery like—like—"

Remembering again that she was speaking to Cash Lamont's children, she stopped suddenly and sat slowly shaking her head.

"We'll have a bite to eat," Jarrell decided, "and then we'll all go down to Crawford to find out if the dead man really is Weems. You had better see if there is anything in the kitchen, Mrs. Whipple."

The housekeeper got up and left the room at once. Unlike the other villagers, she was not greatly terrified by hants. Her fearlessness had been the qualification Esmerelda had considered in hiring her.

After she was gone, the others sat quiet for a few minutes. Then Jarrell rose and faced the girls.

"Constable Clem Withersbee is an ass!" he ejaculated. "He has fol-

lowed the usual country custom of arresting the wrong man on circumstantial evidence. Of course Kirk Hayward didn't kill Weems. I've known Kirk since we were boys together, and I know he wouldn't harm a fly. If Weems has been murdered, his death has been accomplished by the same mysterious agency that killed father. I'm certain now that some one outside the family knows about the hidden jewels and has been here looking for them. If we find that some one, we shall find Weems' murderer."

Caroline drew close to her husband.

"I'm beginning to lose my interest in the treasure hunt," she said. "I think we had better go back to New Orleans."

Elise said nothing. She was occupied with a riot of conflicting impulses. To tell what she knew of the crime would be to throw suspicion on Hayward, and, like her brother, she felt almost positive that Hayward would not have stooped to the crime.

Jarrell patted his wife's shoulder soothingly.

"Don't be frightened," he said reassuringly. "This thing will look a lot less terrible in the morning."

He led the conversation away from the subject of the murder.

In a short time Mrs. Whipple came into the room to announce that supper was ready, and they all went into the dining-room. Although the housekeeper had prepared an excellent meal, no one enjoyed the food much. After making a pretense of eating, they all returned to the living-room.

Jarrell looked at his watch.

"Seven-thirty," he announced. "Get your wraps, girls, and we'll drive over to Crawford. We'll have to hurry. I think there is a storm brewing."

They were soon ready and Jarrell helped them into the car. Mrs. Whipple sat in the back seat with Elise, and Caroline snuggled into the driver's seat with her husband. Jarrell drove fast. The startling news had upset him more than he cared to admit, and he found some relief for his feelings in speeding.

At Pine Tree Inn he stopped for a few minutes to interview Tab Shepard. The innkeeper corroborated Mrs. Whipple's story and added a few details of his own invention. To Elise's relief, he said nothing concerning her part in the happenings of the preceding night.

Jarrell thanked Tab for the information and drove on to Crawford. He stopped the car before the postoffice at eight o'clock. There seemed to be some excitement in the village. A crowd was gathered in the street. Of an old man Jarrell inquired the cause of the commotion.

The old fellow answered in a shaking voice, "Young Hayward's broke jail. He knocked Blaine Murchison senseless, an' got away about an hour ago. They're a-formin' a poss' to hunt him; goin' to send to the city fer bloodhounds, mebbe."

Jarrell left the girls in the machine and went over to the constable's office. There he listened to long-winded stories of the doctor's escape, of the arrest, of the discovery of the body, of Bill Joy's wild run. Out of the whole mass of tales he got nothing of real value concerning the mystery. He became certain, however, of one thing. Hayward was innocent. He had been illegally arrested, and his breaking jail had been justified.

On his return to the car, Jarrell gave the girls the less lurid details of the situation.

"I think we may as well go back to the house," he concluded, "unless you girls are afraid to stay there tonight. It's starting to rain, and I don't care to be caught out in a storm."

Both Elise and Caroline declared their willingness to return to the old

place, and Jarrell drove back. At nine o'clock they were sitting again before the living-room fire in Lamont House.

The storm which had threatened had broken out in full fury, and the wind howled about the eaves and dashed the rain against the windows. The girls chatted nervously of many things, while Jarrell sat silently thinking over the muddle of circumstances. Mrs. Whipple had gone to her room immediately after the return to the house.

The living-room looked just as cheery and commonplace as it had in the afternoon, but now the very atmosphere seemed charged with a nervous tension. All felt this, yet no one ventured to say anything about it. To Elise particularly the evening was one of unrelieved horror.

They sat there by the fire for more than an hour. Although all were tired, each hesitated to be the first to go to bed. Finally Jarrell got up and took the large lamp from the mantel.

"We can't drive away the hant by sitting up waiting for it," he said lightly, and guided the girls back along the hall toward the bedrooms. "You can have the room adjoining ours, Sis," he said. "There's a door between that we'll leave unlocked. I'll light your lamp for you."

They went into the chamber, and he found and lighted a lamp on the dresser and carefully locked the door leading into the hall. Then he and Caroline said good-night and went into their own room through the inner door.

HER nerves steadied a little by the knowledge that the hall door was locked and that Jarrell was within easy reach, Elise undressed quickly, put out the light, and got into the great canopied bed. She lay for a while thinking of the various phases of the mystery, but her thoughts became confused. At last, lulled by an overpowering weariness, she fell asleep.

From this first deep slumber of nervous exhaustion she came gradually to consciousness perhaps a half hour later. She lay dreaming awake for a time, striving to penetrate the velvet darkness. Something strange, she felt, had aroused her. She listened breathlessly for several seconds, but there was no sound save the moaning of the storm, and she came to the conclusion that nothing was wrong.

Then, as she was composing herself to sleep again, she became aware suddenly of the cause of her awakening. A peculiar, oppressive odor pervaded the atmosphere, an odor somehow vaguely familiar, yet one which she failed to recognize fully. Frightened, she sat up in bed and stared into the blackness. Was it her imagination? She seemed to feel rather than see a darker shape moving against the dark opening between her bed curtains. From somewhere above her came a stealthy, sibilant sound, as of measured breathing.

She fell back among the pillows spellbound with horror. Breath by breath, that fearful, hissing sound continued. There was a nameless presence in that region of breathing black. She struggled to speak, to cry out for Jarrell; but not a sound would come from her parched throat. Like the power of a nightmare, her terror clutched her and held her motionless.

After what seemed an age, the whispering noise died away to silence, and she regained a remnant of her courage. Cautiously, lest she attract the attention of the intruder, she rose again to a sitting posture and began to grope for the opening in the curtains. If she could only get out of that room safely, she knew that Jarrell would protect her. Still she fairly sickened at the thought of what might lurk in those velvet shadows.

Her hand touched the hangings and caused them to sway slightly. At that instant something horrible beyond words writhed down from the top of the canopy, slid slimily over her bare arm, and thudded to the floor. There was a rustle as of a heavy body being dragged across the high-piled carpet.

Elise was momentarily numb with terror. Then, screaming again and again, she sprang from the bed and fled blindly for her brother's room.

As she reached the door, a flash of lightning struck a bright flare through the window, and revealed to her a fleeting glimpse of what had awakened her. Stooping near the bed to pick up a huge, twisting snake, was the figure of a man.

She flung herself into Jarrell's room in a frenzy of fear. Jarrell sprang to her and caught her in his arms.

"Elise, Elise," he cried, "what is the matter?"

"In there," she gasped, "something—"

The crash of a door in the next room caused her to scream again.

"Stay here! Lock the door!" Jarrell shouted, and plunged in pursuit of the intruder.

Caroline was a girl of unusual courage, but Elise's terror communicated itself to her. With shaking hands she found a match and lighted the lamp. As the flame dispelled the awful darkness, Elise began to recover her self-control. Soon she was able to speak coherently enough to tell Caroline what had happened.

"There was a horrid creature in there," she half sobbed. "He had a snake in his hands, and it—it fell on me."

A sudden clatter from the hall interrupted her. It was unmistakably the noise of a struggle.

"Jarrell!" Caroline cried out. "He may be in danger of his life. Come."

She snatched up the lamp and ran to the door. Elise clung to her. As they came out of the bedroom, a gust of cold, dank air almost put out the light. They looked for the source of the draft, and found it. The great doors at the end of the hall were swinging wide open.

They dashed down the long corridor and out through the black opening into the cavern of the unused room beyond. There they paused a moment confused, uncertain which way to turn.

While they stood looking about the strange chamber, some one came dashing up from the darkness and almost ran against them. The light flared up just long enough to disclose the features of the man. Then a gust of air plunged them into darkness.

Elise cried out and shrank back against Caroline. In that instant before the light went out she had recognized Kirk Hayward.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SOURCE OF THE DUST

HAYWARD waited until Postmaster Murchison was out of sight in the gathering darkness, and then he started across the fields for Lamont House. He kept well hidden from the sight of any one who might be going along the road, making a wide detour to avoid the vicinity of Pine Tree Inn, for he did not dare risk a chance meeting with one of the villagers.

Lamont House flashed upon him, glowing from a half dozen windows in the eastern wing, that part of the old mansion which he had found it impossible to enter on the previous evening. He could scarcely give credence to the evidence of his own eyes that Jarrell Lamont had taken his bride and his sister into that habitation of ghosts; yet there was no other plausible explanation of the lights he saw.

With extreme caution he crept along the edge of the wood which bordered the Lamont grounds until he reached a point opposite the cellar window which he had marked as a

possible means of ingress to the building the night before. He was shielded here from the rays from the east wing windows, and he had no difficulty in reaching the window undiscovered.

Silently he slipped through the opening into one of the store rooms of the dank cellar. He stopped long enough to fasten back the cover of the scuttle-hole in such a way that it could not possibly swing shut and make him a prisoner. He would have no serious obstructions in case he should need to make a hasty exit from the basement.

There was an atmosphere about the cellar that differed strikingly from the dusty dryness of the rooms above. The stone walls were damp and chill. There was a hint of the uncanny about these underground passages, a weird, kinetic emanation which seemed to warn him that another presence was somewhere near, lurking, hostile, watching for a chance to reach out and seize him. For the first time he realized that he was without a weapon and engaged in a search for a something that stopped at no crime to avenge or protect itself. He wished for the spanner from his car or even a stout wooden club. Groping along the floor in the hope of finding a stick, he touched a cold, knobby object which moved away from the contact of his hand. He shrank back in spite of himself, for the thing had felt like the back of a gnarled hand drawn back slowly under his fingers. Hastily he brought out a match from his pocket and struck it on his heel. The flame flared and disclosed the uncanny object which had startled him. It was an ordinary garden toad.

Kirk laughed rather sheepishly as the match burned out. His imagination was playing him tricks. He struck another light and entered the next room. It was large and cluttered with rubbish of a hundred different sorts. The only peculiarity he noticed was the prevalence of the same sickeningly sweet odor which he had smelt the night before just before he fell asleep on the stairs. The scent was untraceable, but it was omnipresent.

He continued his exploration, his nerves keyed to the point of highest tension. One find was valuable, the five-inch butt of a guttered candle wedged in a crevice in the wall. He lighted the burnt wick and found its flickering flame much brighter than the feeble glow of the match had been. The candle glow was dimly reflected by the niter upon the walls in such a way as to add to the weirdness of the place.

For what seemed an hour, Kirk roamed about the cellar in search of a clue that might lead to some explanation of the mystery; but it was not until he had nearly completed his round of the chambers that he chanced upon anything out of the ordinary. As he rounded a corner of the huge chimney which connected the broad fireplaces upon the several floors above, he stumbled over a litter of bricks and mortar torn from the side of the sooty flue. There was a hole in the chimney large enough to admit the body of a man. The soot door of the flue had been taken out and the opening had been enlarged.

Kirk thrust his head into the aperture and peered up the chimney. A rectangle of lightning-lit sky some vast distance above him flashed for an instant upon his vision. The flue was unobstructed.

Kirk sought for some reason for the tearing away of the brickwork, but could find none. He did find another candle, however, and lighted it from the wavering flame of his earlier find. With the new light he explored the room in the vicinity of the chimney.

Candle drippings proved that the place had been occupied quite recently; a heap of old rags on a torn mattress had evidently been used as a bed. In a corner beside the bed lay a peculiar looking instrument consisting

of a bellows-like pouch attached to a large hollow hood.

Kirk picked up the strange object and examined it. He pressed the pouch, and a fume of dust poured out the open mouth of the hood. The dust, he noticed, was heavy and clinging so that it did not fly about in the air to any extent.

Suddenly an explanation of part of the mystery forced itself upon him. Here was the means by which the prowler in the old house had covered up the traces of his hands on the stair rail. the signs of the murder in the den. With this bellows bag of heavy dust, the creature had succeeded in mystifying and frightening Elise and in driving her pellmell out into the storm. The bellows was so cunningly fashioned and the dust was so heavy, Kirk found, that a smooth covering of gray could be laid over a surface almost instantly without fogging the air in the vicinity.

The solution of the mystery might be rather simple after all, Kirk thought. He would extinguish his candle and lie in wait for the prowler here in its secret lair.

He looked about again for a weapon and was overjoyed to find among the bricks on the floor the short iron crowbar that the intruder had used in tearing the hole in the chimney.

The thing, whatever it was, Kirk reasoned, must be somewhere abovestairs; therefore he selected a hiding place in the angle between the chimney and the cellar wall and set himself to a siege of watching. his hand gripping the haft of his makeshift billy. He blew out the candle flame.

HE HAD only a little while to wait. Suddenly he became alert, his every muscle tense. From somewhere out of the rooms above him came the distant but unmistakable sound of a woman's scream. Faint as the cry came to him. it chilled him with horror, so keen was its tone of utter terror. An instant after the shriek was heard, the thud of running feet sounded on the floor above. Shouting followed and a confused muddle of noise.

Kirk felt the hair on the back of his neck rise. He rose slowly to his feet and gripped the iron bar in his left hand. In his right hand he held ready a heavy piece of rock with which he hoped to be able to damage the prowler before the creature should come within striking distance of the billy.

The tumult above-stairs arose in volume. Kirk crept to the front of his hiding place and stood staring into the void of the large room of the cellar. He hoped to catch sight of the prowling thing before it espied him.

His ears caught a sound close at hand. It was the turning of a rusty door latch. Some intuitive sense warned him that the moment for action had come.

His ear caught the rustle of some slight movement in the wall to his left. An instant later the blackness was broken by a shaft of light as a door in the wall opposite Kirk's position swung slowly open. Kirk started forward. and stepped clear of the wall near which he had been standing.

Silhouetted against that doorway was a weird figure carrying just such a candle as Kirk had extinguished only a moment before. The creature was facing the room from which it had just emerged, so that its back was toward Hayward. It was half crouched as if listening for sounds of pursuit from the rooms above and was entirely oblivious of the young man's presence.

Kirk drew back the hand in which he clutched the piece of stone and sent the missile crashing into the thickest part of the silhouetted figure. Even as the rock left his hand, he leaped forward to follow up his advantage.

But the result of his coup was astounding. Came a crash of breaking

glass, and the entire scene winked out as though some one instantly had dropped a curtain of black velvet across the doorway. There was no outcry, no thud of falling body, nothing but the crash of broken glass. A door slammed almost at Hayward's elbow, and running footsteps sounded behind the wall at his back.

Even before he could strike a match and relight his extinguished candle, Kirk realized what had happened. He had hurled the piece of stone, not at the figure of the prowler, but at its reflection in a huge mirror which had stood before the wall facing the door through which the creature had sought to enter the cellar. He lighted the candle and proved the truth of his supposition. Fragments of the shattered glass littered the floor everywhere.

He turned quickly to the door in the wall. One leap carried him to it, and he threw it wide and rushed up the flight of stairs which it masked. His candle was extinguished in his dash up the stairs and when he reached the floor above the cellar he found himself lost in utter darkness. Then he almost collided with Elise.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AT GRIPS WITH THE THING

WITH the echo of Elise's terrifying shriek still in his ears, Jarrell hurled himself in pursuit of that flying shape in the darkness. He ran down the hall and dived through the doorway that connected the two parts of the old mansion. Somewhere ahead he could hear the thud of bare feet, but he had difficulty in locating the sound in the echoing corridors. He wished desperately for a light, and even considered going back for a lamp.

Apparently the door leading to the unused rooms had not been open long, for the atmosphere was musty and dust-fogged. The clouds of dust stung his eyes and nearly choked him. Assuredly the creature he was chasing had abandoned its stealth and was making a wild dash to escape.

The darkness and his unfamiliarity with the rooms forced him to slacken his pace. As he slowed up and groped his way forward, the noise of the flying footsteps ahead became fainter, until it died out altogether. The thing he was following had a more thorough knowledge of the house than Jarrell.

He continued his advance along the seemingly interminable hall, going slowly and as silently as possible lest he come upon the prowler lying in wait around a corner. But he found nothing.

He reached a turn in the corridor, and a flare of lightning illuminating the place, he found that he was at the foot of a flight of steps which led to the floor above. He paused a few seconds, then determined to climb the stairs to investigate the room on the second floor.

He crept up past the window and crouched at the head of the flight. The utter silence of the place was trying to his nerves, and an occasional flash of lightning through the window kept him starting at shadows. The silence endured for perhaps two minutes, which seemed two hours to Jarrell. Then from somewhere below-stairs came a crash, followed almost instantly by the slam of a door and the sound of running steps. This time the steps were approaching.

Jarrell crouched deeper in the angle of the wall and gathered himself for a spring when the creature should reach the top of the stairs. The prowler crashed into the corridor below and rushed up the steps with the panic haste of a trapped animal. Jarrell could hear its gasping breath as it ran.

A long, livid glare of lightning struck through the window and made the stairway light as day as the creature sprang to the top step. Jarrell leaped forward and grappled with a

thing of bone and sinew, wiry and powerful, supple as a snake. The creature's body exuded a sickening odor that was almost overpowering. By a second flash of light from the window, Jarrell saw his antagonist, and the sight staggered him.

"Miedo!" he shouted, and struck at the hawk-like face of the Aztec priest.

The struggle was short. Although the Aztec was strong, the younger man was his master. In a few seconds Jarrell had his foe bent backward across his knee and was choking the life out of him. He threw his entire strength into the fight, for he knew that he must kill or be killed.

The talon-like hands of the Aztec tore frantically at Jarrell's side. Jarrell loosed one hand from the hairy throat to clutch at the ripping claws. In that instant something almost unspeakable happened.

As Jarrell's head came close to the Aztec's shoulder, something slimy and chill squirmed up out of the filthy shirt and hissed into the young man's face. It was a huge snake.

Jarrell involuntarily leapt back from the clammy touch of the serpent and lost his grip of Miedo's throat. The Aztec writhed free with a powerful twist that threw Jarrell toward the stairs. The young man's foot slipped on the edge of the top step, and he plunged backward down the flight. With a bound the Aztec went down the hall and plunged into the seventh room.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE JEWELS OF THE TEMPLE

"DOCTOR HAYWARD!" Elise could not suppress the cry as she recognized the man before her.

Kirk struck a match and stood revealed in the wavering light, dishevelled and covered with dust from his exploration of the cellar.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Lamont. Give me that lamp, please."

His voice was reassuringly steady.

Caroline handed over the lamp, and Kirk lighted it. Without a word he turned and ran down the hall. The trembling girls followed.

At the foot of the stairs that led to the upper floor lay Jarrell in a huddled heap. All three sprang to his assistance, but he shook free of their arms and pointed up the stairs.

"Never mind me," he gasped. "Get Miedo! He's somewhere up there!"

Hayward leapt for the stairs, and mounted swiftly to the hall above.

"Don't let him at you from behind!" Jarrell cautioned.

The fugitive was not in the corridor. Kirk ran straight to the seventh room, and, lamp before him, stepped cautiously through the shattered door.

As he had half expected, the room of the murder was empty. He gave a snort of disgust and started for the hall again, when a noise from the fireplace caught his attention. He listened a moment and the sound was repeated, the unmistakable sound of a groan.

Slowly and quietly he crossed to the huge hearth and slipped back to the rear of the chimney. The groans were clearly audible here: they came from the black chasm that yawned below the grate floor. There was the rustle of a feeble struggle, and the groans became fainter.

Kirk brought the lamp to the edge of the floor and let it down cautiously into the flue. He did not dare let his body appear above the opening, for he remembered too well the deadly force and accuracy with which the creature he was pursuing had hurled that glittering sheath knife the night before.

But the lowering of the lamp into the chimney brought no reply from the abyss. The groans could still be heard, but they sounded faint and dis-

tant. Emboldened by the silence of his quarry, Hayward thrust his head and shoulders over the edge of the floor, held the light as far down into the darkness as he could reach, and strained his eyes to see what was at the bottom of the chimney.

The large lamp gave a brilliant light that shone far down into the black pit. At the bottom Hayward could see something that moved feebly among the shifting shadows. Miedo had fallen down the chimney and was badly hurt.

Kirk drew back from the flue, and as he lifted the lamp to the floor he caught the glint of metal on the wall of the chimney next the hearth. He stooped to examine the object that had reflected the light. It was the dangling end of a broken steel ladder.

As he crawled out of the fireplace he came face to face with Jarrell, who had recovered from the effects of his fall down the stairs and was eager to join in the chase.

Hayward led the way to the cellar and to the opening in the base of the chimney. He picked up the iron bar he had held as a weapon earlier in the evening, for he feared treachery on the part of the Aztec. The murderer might be merely simulating injury to bring his antagonists within striking distance of a knife.

As the lamp light struck through the hole in the chimney, it revealed Miedo lying helpless, his body twisted grotesquely. Hayward knew from the Aztec's position that his back was broken.

Thinking to lift the injured man out to the cellar floor, the two young men reached into the flue. They had got hold of Miedo's shoulders and were about to move him, when a cry from Caroline caused them to jump back.

They were just in time, for the great adder the old priest had carried in his bosom had reared its head and was about to strike at them with its venomed fangs. Kirk made one stroke with the iron bar, and the snake lay writhing, its head smashed into the floor.

With some difficulty they got the Aztec out of the chimney and laid him on the mattress that had served him for a bed. He was far spent, but conscious. His beady eyes glittered with the fire of unquenchable hate.

"No good," he groaned in Spanish. "I try more—than—twenty years to get back—jewels of the temple. Kill both—thieves—"

His voice trailed away to a whisper.

"What's this?"

Jarrell was peering into the hole in the chimney.

"Looks as though the bottom of the flue was hollow. It's caved in here where Miedo fell."

Kirk brought the light close to the opening again, and with the iron bar they began to dig at the broken floor of the chimney. At the third stroke the bar went through the shell of bricks and struck with a thud upon something that sounded strangely hollow.

Caroline became excited the moment she heard the hollow thud.

"It's the treasure!" she cried. "Miedo has found the jewels too late to do him any good!"

Kirk dug at the floor of the chimney with furious speed. He soon uncovered a heavy wooden slab, the cover of a large chest.

It was the work of a moment to wrench loose the lock from the age-weakened wood and to fling back the cover of the box.

From beneath that broken cover a mass of jewels flashed from a thousand gleaming facets. Kirk and Jarrell sprang back amazed. Elise and Caroline were wild with delight.

From the corner where the mattress lay came a clawing noise, and the four turned to see the old Aztec priest trying vainly to lift his broken body.

(*Continued on page* 180)

YOUTH

By HOWARD R. MARSH

MARTIN ZUCKER reversed the usual process. All heroes, it is well known, enjoy a kinetographic review of their entire past lives in that brief, fearful second when they stand on the threshold of the hereafter and bravely stare death out of countenance. Martin Zucker, on the contrary, watched the little movie of his past life as he came back into being, as he lingered in that anesthetized zone between coma and consciousness. But Martin Zucker was not a hero; perhaps that accounted for his reversion of the usual process.

This is what Zucker reviewed on his own little mental screen:

A youth, far distant, when he starved and suffered and played in the lumber settlement of Johnstown; a love episode with Hilda Juessing; three, four, five years of labor in the woods, felling trees, suffering with the cold, sweating and freezing at once, to earn money to marry Hilda; a single flash, the murder of Hilda and Lars Behr; then a numbness, mental and physical, which endured through months, years.

Gray days, monotonous days: they flickered by on the screen. Each was like the last; he began each day by dragging himself from his cell cot, dressing in the semi-darkness, marching step for step with the man ahead of him and the man behind, out past the tally-guard, into the chair factory. Then hours of wrapping soft paper pulp around frames to make "wicker" furniture, reaching for the paper strips, wrapping, wrapping, reaching again and wrapping again. A brief respite for lunch—beans, coffee and bread and butter—and then back to the prison factory and the everlasting wrapping of chairs. At night, back to the dining hall with eight hundred other gray-faced, lusterless men; a few moments to satisfy the animal desire of hunger; and then the black night in cell No. 656.

The nights were no more distinguishable than the days. Sometimes he had visions of Hilda, but he drove them away by pounding his fists against the steel bars until his knuckles were raw and bleeding and the ache of his hands occupied his mind.

To Martin Zucker there was no such thing as time. Day and night, night and day; work and eat, eat and sleep. That was all. From time to time the men who worked beside him told with elation of their approaching freedom. From time to time men left their benches and Zucker appreciated that they were going back to that dim figment, the world. He didn't envy them their freedom, for to him it meant nothing. Except food and sleep and work, nothing meant anything to Zucker. Least of all, time.

Then there was a sudden change. A doctor had talked to him, cross-examined him, asked a question which Zucker scarcely understood. But as he labored mentally over the doctor's words in his cell that night he began to understand. The doctor had promised him—Youth!

FROM that moment of realization the mental pictures became clearer. There was, the next day, the prison hospital; a white clinic room; a dozen avid doctors, and in the center one who fingered instruments with a certain gloating delight. He treasured a tiny, gelatin-filled bottle but did not treasure his words, the subtitles of the drama.

"This transplanting of glands," the paunchy surgeon explained, "is no longer an experimental operation.

Its results are now generally considered absolute. There is a rejuvenation of all body tissues and glands: in short, a return to youth. I foresee the time when man, at his choice, can enjoy the glow of youth far beyond his allotted time . . . I . . . I wonderful . . . I . . ."

Martin Zucker, still reviewing the film of his past life as he hesitated on the threshold of consciousness, couldn't remember all of the doctor's words. He recalled his desire that the doctor would cease talking, hurry with the wonderful operation. Then, more vividly, came back to him the doctor's description:

"This man, Zucker, sixty-nine years old, approaching senile decay, has agreed to submit to the transplanting of glands before the clinic. He is a prisoner in this institution, has been for years. Yet he is a particularly favorable patient for the operation. As far as I can determine, his family history is without pathological or psychological incident. His forebears were poor, sturdy woodsmen; he followed in their footsteps and has an unusually rugged physique. Except for the commission of a single crime, a crime of an emotional nature, his own life is without interesting features. He approaches the operation in an optimistic frame of mind, believing, as I do, that he will leave the hospital a young man, rejuvenated—that he will have another lifetime ahead of him, virile . . . Nurse, place the cone . . . The operation . . . pituitary region . . . careful suturing . . ."

Zucker recalled now how the doctor's words faded out in the sweet oblivion of ether.

And now the operation was over and Martin Zucker, on a bed in the hospital, was resting with half-closed eyes and reviewing all the events that had brought him there. He was not in great pain. True, there was nausea, there was aggravating dryness of his throat, which water could not relieve. And there had been moments of terror as he came from under the influence of ether; moments in which he fell clutching through space; other moments in which he again beat Lars Behr to death with his fists, took the white throat of Hilda Juessing in his hands and strangled her.

But these terrors left him as his brain cleared. Suddenly he smiled.

Youth! He, Martin Zucker, sixty-nine years old, was a young man! Wonderful! No call now to review his past life; no, he would think only of the future.

He began to picture youth; he pictured it in many ways. At first the vision was only of physical strength and vigor, of freedom from fatigue and aches. Then it widened and included the woods—the woods in which he had worked in his prime. He was back there again, young and stalwart, sinking his two-bitted ax into the odorous wood of a Norway pine; he was scuffing through the snow, dragging a logging chain which few men could lift; he was in the bunkhouse, challenging all the jacks to a free-for-all.

Gradually that picture faded and another, even more brightly tinted, came. There was a woman in this picture. Of course Hilda was gone. But there were other fair-haired, physically attractive girls, such as Hilda had been. And they would love Martin Zucker—love him because he was young and powerful and virile. They would see him, smile at him, almost court him. . . Youth seeking youth, girls seeking Martin Zucker. . .

HE SMILED happily. He was smiling in a superior sort of way when the prison warden walked to his bedside and asked, "How are you feeling this morning, Zucker?"

Martin's smile was sufficient answer; he was much too happy for words.

"The doctor says the operation was entirely successful," the warden as-

sured him. "He says that you may have another thirty or forty years of comparative youth. Of course he is rabid on the subject. But at that I wouldn't be surprized if you outlived me here, and I'm only forty."

". . . outlived me *here!*" The words stuck in Martin Zucker's mind. "Here." Just what did the warden mean? Certainly not the hospital, for the doctor had promised him that he would be disabled only a week or two.

But "here!" That certainly didn't mean the odorous pine woods of the north; it didn't mean the place where he would find the beautiful fair-haired successor to Hilda.

"Here!" Martin Zucker's face aged; a terrible thought brought the cold sweat to his brow. He groaned and turned his face to the wall. "Here!"

Ah! A long time "here!" For Martin Zucker, to whom time had meant nothing and to whom the future promised nothing, had suddenly been shown the pricelessness of time and the promise of the future.

The operation had done that. The operation had made him young, too. And the operation promised him . . .

Another life time in prison. For Martin Zucker was serving a life sentence.

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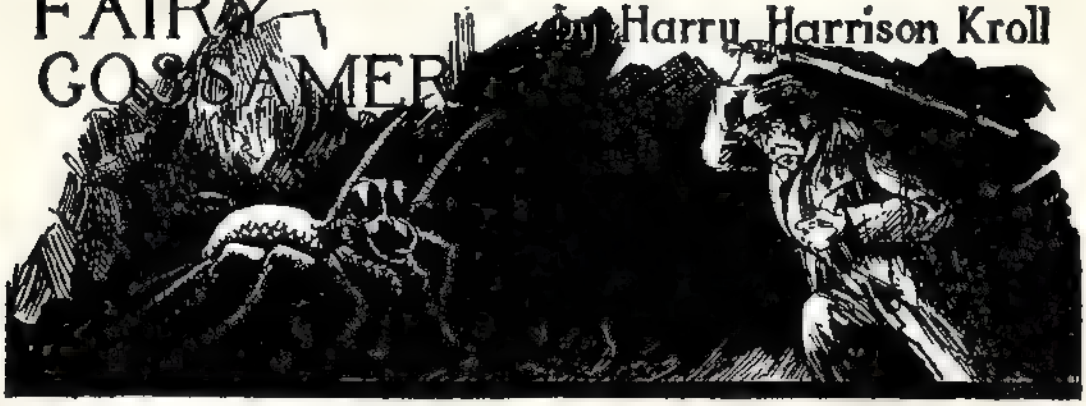
FAIRY GOSSAMER



By Harry Harrison Kroll

If you find spider gossamer in the autumn of the year when the spider balls hatch and the young go forth into the world, it's a sign that the fairies are leading you on to good fortune.—OLD FOLKS' SAYING.

WILLIAM THOMPSON sat at the opening of the sink-hole absorbedly watching tiny strands of spider gossamer issue from the orifice. He had come to this spot in the cavernous limestone region of Kentucky in search of a specimen of the genus *Arimnes*, the most brilliantly colored of temperate zone spiders, his college work in biology at Vanderbilt necessitating his discovering such a specimen. Hearing of a legend current in this neighborhood about spiders, he had come here in the hope of satisfying his requirement.

The story related that years ago one Israel Hicks, suddenly gone crazy and believing himself pursued by an evil spirit, had come out here and begun the breeding of spiders that he might devise a web to entangle the demon that vexed him. It was averred that, previous to his going insane, he had been a wealthy bluegrass farmer; and many believed that he possessed considerable riches. At any rate, the last of his name and kind, he had come here and lived alone, spending his time and energies in catching spiders and shutting them up in a mysterious insectary, which he never permitted any one to visit. And now the old man had been dead these many long years, and likely was well rid of his evil spirit, and none would probably ever know much more about him and his peculiar hallucination.

"There are spiders somewhere in this locality," William told himself, as he continued to observe the strands of silk wafted up out of the hole. "And if I could investigate down in that sink-hole, I believe I might find just what I am looking for."

He tried getting down into the hole, but apparently it would not readily admit passage of his body.

"Strange about that draft," he continued to meditate. "I never knew one of these glacial blow-outs to have a draft before."

He tested the strength of the air current by casting some leaves into the opening. These fragments rose several feet above the surrounding ground level before the force of the air was sufficiently modified to permit them to drop.

"Well, well," he said thoughtfully; "if I could find the other end of this passage, the chances are that I would find my spider."

He began an examination of sink-holes near by, of which there were many; for in a past geological age a great explosion of natural gas had honeycombed the entire under-surface region, these pits being outlets of the force of the detonation. But

none of the others appeared to have a draft. An ignited match (a certain test of air movement) burnt over them as undisturbed as a candle flame in a closed room. It was apparent to William that there was no direct connection between the pit with a draft and its kindred near by.

"The air has to get in some way, though," he reasoned. "If it comes out, it surely has to go in. One of the holes hereabouts has to have a downward draft."

But no amount of search revealed it. Presently, after an extended exploration, he returned to the chimney hole.

"Israel Hicks," he recalled meditatively out of the traditions of this authority as they had been recounted to him, "used to say that you never see gossamer except in the fall of the year, it being the spinning of the new spider brood. Now, any idiot knows that where there is gossamer there are spiders. I've got to locate the other end of this hole. Likely as not when I do I will have located old man Hicks' spider incubator. I'll wager that it is one gloriously interesting place for the biologist."

The idea fascinated him, for the old lunatic was reputed to have had a fancy collection of spiders. William obtained a long, slender stick, and prodded down into the hole. He found by the experiment that the passageway went deep into the earth, and bent in the direction of the old house, several hundred yards away on a hill, where the old man had made his home. William scratched his head in perplexity. Did the hole come out somewhere near, or under, the house?

He dashed up the hill and into the yard. An eager search of the abandoned enclosure, however, disclosed no such hole as he looked for. He continued his search into the ruinous old house. The floor was gone, and he found an open cellar glaring vacantly back at the patches of sky that showed through the holes in the clapboards. He stood baffled, for nothing of interest met his eyes. Then suddenly he became aware, across the spot where he stood on the stone cellar bottom, of a draft that chilled his feet. Bending down for a test with his hand, he discerned a steady air movement fanning his feet and entering a crack in the cobbles. By listening he could even hear the sound of it whistling into the hole.

"Aha!" he ejaculated. "The old lunatic had a secret passageway down to his spider hatchery. Let's raise this rock and take a peek inside."

This he did, and there was disclosed, leading deep into the cavernous maw of the earth, a natural tunnel. He had his flashlight with him; and slipping down through the opening, he began the descent. Presently daylight behind him had disappeared. Another turn of the passageway thrust him into Stygian darkness. Down, down he went. Had he not been somewhat familiar with caves, he probably would have lost his nerve and refused to penetrate any farther. Cobwebs hung everywhere—millions of them, lodged here over the long years since old Israel Hicks had first introduced the spinners. There was no question in William's mind that he had found the previously unknown spider hatchery of the crazy old loon. The chances were that he would find the specimen he sought, since Hicks had been a connoisseur in his line of business and likely had overlooked none of the types in the region.

Presently, as he had surmised, he arrived at a widening of the passageway, which in turn opened into a large, cavernous chamber. As he stepped down into the larger room, quite unexpectedly a pivoted rock, not unlike some vast door to a sepulcher, swung to behind him. He paused fearfully, believing that his egress was cut off. But far ahead of him a speck of daylight reassured him—evi-

dently the sink-hole came out into the cavern there, and he could make his escape at the same outlet as the fairy gossamer. He went on, flashing his light on every hand.

WHAT a dreary, haunted den it was! The endless walls of slimy, irregular ceiling were gray with the ashen webs of innumerable spiders. Beads of moisture clung to many of the festoons, which besprinkled him with chill showers. Literally thousands of the curious, agile creatures, leaping out into view for possible prey at his entrance, as suddenly and uncannily withdrew to their silken refuges when he turned his light upon them. Their myriad cunning eyes, in that momentary scrutiny, almost frightened him, and caused a cold shudder to run up his spine.

Then with a sudden and involuntary exclamation he stopped. He had found the prize, a beautiful *Arimnes*, possessing perhaps the loveliest geometric markings he had ever observed in the type: almost as large as a silver dollar, with long, graceful legs, and a brilliant figure on its head and another on its back, and intensely black eyes.

His problem, now that he had found it, was to snare it. And no easy problem would it be, as he well knew, for the *Arimnes* is as cunning as it is beautiful, and as fearless and savage as it is cunning. Moreover, William had no desire to risk being bitten by this gentleman. Although the type is regarded as non-poisonous, or but mildly so, nevertheless there were authentic cases where individuals were deadly venomous. He had with him a device manufactured from a fishing reel, section of hat-wire, and gauze, intended to capture insects. With this contrivance he began craftily stalking the prey.

The spider retreated, William following. Then, with cunning suddenness, the creature darted down into a crevice of the rock wall. Out of this retreat William could not budge him. No amount of mild persuasion appeared in the least to affect this crafty gentleman. Finally, at his wits' end, William as a last desperate expedient punched down into the crack with his reel. He desired the specimen alive, but a dead one would be better than none.

It was, as he was to perceive when too late, an ill advised move. Seemingly the hordes of spiders were waiting for just such a signal, for suddenly they were upon him in one great, hungry mob. Great, hairy demons dropped upon his head from above; they crawled across his unprotected face; he felt them creeping up his trousers legs! Although he frantically brushed them off, slapping them out of his eyes and trying in the darkness to stamp upon them, his efforts seemed only to attract other packs of them.

His mind worked rapidly. Knowing the habits of spiders, and the fact that they may go without food for as long as a year and a half, and in such a state are ravenous, he realized that it would be only a question of time before they would overpower him by their very numbers and devour his body. There in the darkness with no protection and only his flashlight to show the way, it might seem a hopeless task to cope with them. Neither could he beat his way back as he had come, for the pivoted rock cut off his retreat. He could only strive forward, knocking the spiders from his face as he went, and trust to providence to effect his escape by way of the chimneylike suckhole. He therefore began moving forward as best he might, his hat pulled low over his eyes, his coat collar turned up, and his free hand acting as a relentless brush against the stinging, voracious arachnids.

HE SENSED dimly that the nebula of light increased on the opposite side of the chamber as he approached that quarter. In fact, it shortly began to take definite shape. If he could hold out for another span of moments, he would make it. But already he was feeling sensations of pain in all parts of his body, and he was becoming giddy, whether from fear or poison he could not be sure, but his hands and face were swelling from bites. And then he stopped in frozen horror!

Immediately in the opening that would give him egress from this terrible place to the good open sunshine above, he saw the form of the most gigantic spider he had ever beheld! From where he stood, even after making allowance for his unreliable perception, it seemed to measure two feet across! It belonged to a genus about which he had read, but which had never been seen before by the eyes of a white man—the monster golden spider, native of the tropics. Where the light fell upon it from above, it gave back an untarnished reflection of the precious metal from which it derived its name.

Curiously enough, as he beat his way closer in spite of the hazard, he found the smaller pests to be dropping off and falling back. He was in the circle of light, too, and that aided him in brushing them off. Many he succeeded in crushing under his heels.

And well might this smaller fry retire, William vaguely reasoned. For this fat old demon had sufficient capacity to devour them as they came.

He took a fresh, firm grip upon his reel, and approached nearer for the inevitable conflict. He would have to fight here, and to the deadly finish. Either he or the giant spider must fall. Nor did the creature move as he crept nearer and nearer. Its golden eyes never flinched. It still maintained its masterful composure as William, staking his fate upon one accurate cut of the steel fishing rod, prepared to cleave its body in twain with the tubing.

His aim proved true, he saw even before the blow fell. It descended clean and sharp across the middle of the spider's body. And then William, almost collapsing from the letdown of his nerves, saw something he could not bring himself for a moment to believe. Instead of the creature writhing about in the death agony, it scattered, not unlike an apparition, with a sudden metallic clanking and jingling! Until his senses returned to him, and the weakness of his legs gave way to some degree of composure, William was unable to examine the results of this singular metamorphosis. When he did, he found the spider to have been made of golden coins, in an artful similitude of the insect.

When able to think constructively, he conjectured the why of it all. Old man Hicks had had two gods: his money, about which but few knew, and spiders, which he bred and loved. He had placed his money here under the protection of the spiders. The arranging of the coins in form of one of them was a curious slant of the old man's fad. And true to their trust all of these long years, the spiders had all but succeeded in their task.

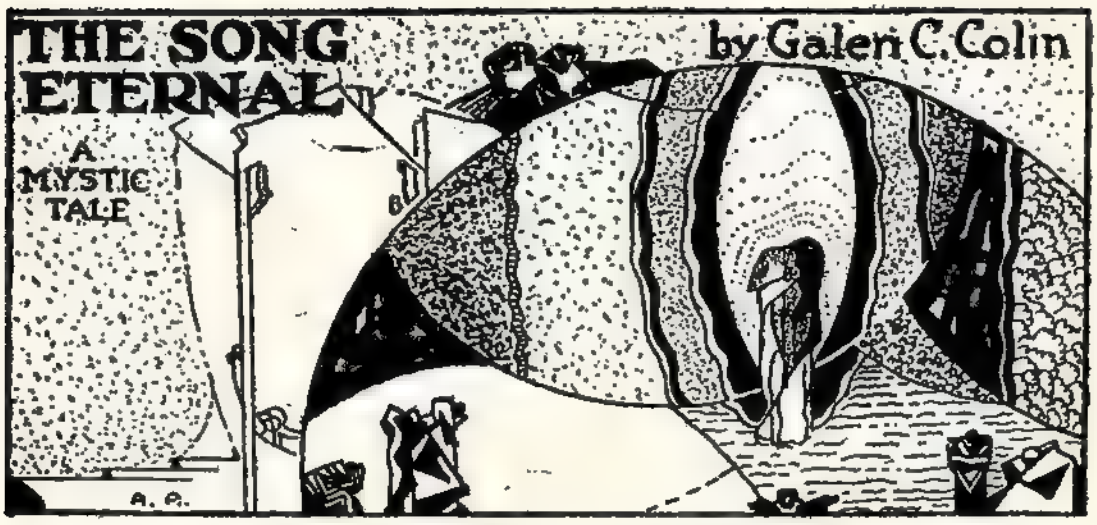
William got out of the cave as quickly as he could, but not before he had collected the coins in his pockets and the overplus in his hat. Out in the glorious open sunshine he breathed free, finding that none of the bites inflicted upon him would result in more than temporary discomfort.

The adventure recalled to his mind two curious superstitions about spiders: one, that the creatures will not attach their webs to, or come near, gold; and the other that if you find the gossamer in the autumn of the year when the spider balls hatch and the young go forth into the world, it's a sign that the fairies are leading you on to good fortune!

THE SONG ETERNAL

by Galen C. Colin

A MYSTIC TALE



Author of "Eyes" and "Snake"

HIS appearance was amazing at first glance, this man who casually seated himself at the table next to Captain Rogers and me in the Café le Bon Homme, in the sweltering, mosquito-ridden little trading post of Seuf, on the coast of West Africa.

He was tall and spare, and suntanned almost to blackness. A thick thatch of iron-gray hair gave the impression, at one angle, of premature grayness; at another angle he seemed an incredibly old man, but slightly grayed by the passing years. His high forehead and well-cut features hinted at refinement and intellectuality, and his speech showed an education of collegiate scope. But most noticeable of all, in fact overshadowing every other feature, were his eyes. They were a queer mixture of gray and brown, and in them you could read whatever you willed; deep melancholy, wild joy, even a spark of madness.

Like the Ancient Mariner, he needs must talk; and after the first few sentences we, rough old sea dogs that we were, listened breathlessly half through the night to a stranger tale than ever a superstitious sailor imagined.

Maybe he was mad—yes, it is even probable that he was. But if so, his madness might well be envied by him who thinks that romance has gone from this staid old world.

As he talked, he spread a thumbed and worn map of Africa on the table. At intervals he would point to different spots on the map and say, "Here I have been and did not find her," and "Here also I failed." Then always back to the same refrain, "Just two more places, friends. She is in one or the other, for every other I have searched."

Here is the story as he told it to us that night in the Café le Bon Homme. Take it or leave it.

TALK of the songs of the troubadours! Pooh! They're but songs of yesterday! My song is forty centuries old—the most wonderful melody in all the world—and I am the only living person, except her, the singer, who has heard it. For me it was first sung, and for me it is calling. Yesterday, and hundreds of yesterdays, it has near driven me mad with longing. First but a half-remembered strain, faint and far away. Now it fills the universe with its sweetness. Purling brooks, warbling birds, the lazy wind through the full-leaved magnolia trees—these are but the background for the wondrous, deep,

rich note of love that dominates. Like the song of the siren it calls and ever calls, but not to destruction, for love is its motif.

I have always been a mystic. In boyhood all my leisure hours were spent alone. The games and interests of other boys held no fascination for me. I loved the quiet of the deeply wooded river bank, or the seclusion of my own room. I was not moody or sullen, but my song never came while there were others near.

At first it was but a note or two, a phrase of unearthly sweetness that sent my blood dancing and almost pulled the heart from me with longing. This is my earliest memory of childhood. Later came more notes and strains, almost, but not quite all, the song itself. Just out of reach were the elusive words. How my being throbbed to its melody! It filled me with a fierce, wild impatience, for it called—called—and I could not guess from where the summons came.

I did not care for learning. All I wanted was to be left alone that I might listen forever to my elusive aria—to feel the intense and painful loneliness with which it filled my heart. But my father insisted upon a course in college; and for this may he be twice blessed; for there I met my only true and understanding friend, Dick Restouer. Like myself, he was a mystic. But the science of the occult was his interest. No older than myself (and I was not yet twenty-two), he had delved deep into the mysteries of mind and matter. He was a deep student of the Yogis, of the Magis, of many teachers from the far corners of the globe. Mesmerism, hypnotism, crystal-gazing, astrology—none held secrets from Dick. One principle only had he not yet mastered.

Many times we two had searched the depths of the crystal, had consulted the stars, had dreamed the Magi dreams for the secret of my song—and always we were unsuccessful.

As we left school the last words Dick said to me held great promise.

"Only a year or two at most, old friend. The great principle is coming to me a little at a time. Soon I will master it, and together we will search for—and find—the singer of your song."

Then he sent for me.

Dick's rooms occupy the whole top floor of a great office building downtown—many thousands a year it must cost him, but he is rich in his own right. It was my first visit there, although we had been in constant touch.

I stepped from the elevator, from out the clamor of industry into a veritable fairyland of beauty. Light came to the vast, vaulted hall through a skylight of pale blue and amber, flooding everything with bewitching color. Deep-napped rugs in rich old tints, figured with mystic and geometric designs, carpeted the mahogany floor. Wonderful marble, bronze, jade and ebony statues of all the old Roman, Greek, Chinese, Egyptian—some still more ancient from before the written history of man—were in every nook and corner. The furniture was all of deep, red, polished mahogany—soft divans, tables, tall candle stands, all chosen by the eye and mind of an artist.

Dominating all was the restless pool in the center. Some twenty feet square, walled with the whitest of alabaster, its opalescent surface heaved and tumbled, diffusing a pale pink light and loosing into the air an almost invisible vapor, sweet-scented beyond the dreams of an oriental princess.

Dick met me at the door. Always eccentric in dress, this evening he was startlingly different from the everyday world, yet strangely in harmony with his surroundings. A long robe of orange mandarin silk enveloped him, and around his waist he had an intricately woven silver girdle clasped

with a great green scarab. His feet were thrust into red morocco sandals with upturned toes, and a circlet of gold bound back his straight black hair. Like some ancient magician he looked. I could almost imagine I stood with the astrologer of Darius the Great.

With outstretched hand he greeted me, and his thin, pale face lit up with a smile of true friendship.

"Old friend, I have learned the secret, and tonight the riddle of your song will be solved. Tell me again, do you really wish it? Will you chance grievous disappointment to learn?"

"It means everything to me, Dick," I answered. "All my life I have waited with growing impatience, and I feel that I shall lose my senses unless I find the answer."

Slowly nodding his head, he turned and beckoned to me to follow him. To the very edge of the pool we walked. Dick spread his thin hands over it in a gesture of supplication, and the turbulent surface became still more restless. It rose and sank, swished and swirled like a whirlpool. The pink light became brighter, until it gave a soft glow to the alabaster bowl itself.

"Friend of my heart, you go on a wonderful journey," said Dick. "Lasting but seconds, you will live years. You will make history that has never been written. I shall be with you in spirit—but otherwise I cannot go."

All the while his hands were moving back and forth above the pool in queer but regular movements. I watched them, fascinated. Now his voice became smooth and low.

"Listen to your song—listen—call to the singer—look!"

The liquid smoothed out—the pink faded—the depth was clear as a mountain lake. As I looked, faint outlines became visible. The room began to fade. Finally only Dick—and the brightening picture in the pool—were left for my startled eyes. As I glanced at the intent look on his thin, dark face, all became dark. I fell, and on my downward course all consciousness was lost.

And then—

2

AS I led my company of tried but victorious warriors up the broad, stone-paved highway, I was intensely glad, for we were nearing home, our wonderful city of Morab. I turned to the slender, dark-faced man who marched at my side.

"Zuren, my friend, great tales we will have to tell the stay-at-homes. Stories of wonderful sights, and still more wonderful fights. Thou, my mystic companion, shalt be the teller of tales. Thou shalt tell them of our three years of adventure."

"Ah, Ro-Moarin," he said with a sad smile, "almost I am sorry that we are nearing our beloved city. The people of darkness tell me that not for long shall we be together. There are murmurings among them as of some great tragedy in view."

I laughed, as I reassured my dearest friend, but his words left me with a vague foreboding. However, I was soon myself again.

Living in the heart of an already dying land, we Morabians must needs venture outside our own small country for our riches. And valiant rovers we were, as our beautiful capital city would attest.

Inspired by the talk of a dark-faced wanderer, I, Ro-Moarin, and my brave band had ventured far toward the setting sun—even to the land of the great river that branches into many as it joins the parent water. We had met and exacted toll of the great, but luxury-weakened, people who dwelt along this river. We had

watched their slaves at work on the mighty pyramids, which were to house the bodies of their dead rulers, and had marveled at their skill in building. We had met and exchanged gifts with a people who built structures that rode the mighty waters, propelled by wind in many squares of cloth. As a proof, we were carrying to our city a wonderful purple dye of transcendent beauty. Also we were bringing many slaves and a hundred mule loads of wealth. Ours was by far the most glorious and profitable venture in the annals of our city.

Chrios, the sun god, had almost finished his journey when we neared the city wall. Swift runners had already carried word of our coming. The slanting rays of the sun lent a dazzling brilliance to the marble-white walls and battlements. The crystal panes and skylights flashed like the burnished shields of a mighty army, and row after row of palms trembled in ecstasy. Surely, in all our travels we had seen no city half so beautiful.

Unconsciously we quickened our pace and hurried toward the western gate—the Gate of the Conquerors. Slowly it swung open, and a magnificent burst of triumphant music filled the motionless evening air—music of horn, and cymbal and drum—music befitting a conqueror. Instinctively we stopped and drew up in full array. Then came the procession. Bands of priests of Chrios marched four abreast, carrying high the banners of Chrios and Morab. They were robed in black from head to toe, gleaming black like a raven's wing, and on each breast emblazoned a golden sun, the emblem of their craft.

Following the priests were the dancing girls, lovely daughters of Morab, fifty or more thinly clad in gold lace and sparkling stones. With crashing cymbals they kept time to their wild, free steps. After them came the city guard, magnificent men and brave. How they envied us and admired us! Their ceremonial armor of silver chain, the polished tips of their spears, sparkled in the setting sun like diamonds, yet we would not trade our tarnished and dirty trappings for all their glitter. Lining the avenue from the gateway into the city was the whole population of Morab.

Advancing, the priests began a chant of salutation:

> All hail, Ro-Mearin!
> All hail to his victorious band!
> Unto them are the gates of Morab opened;
> Through the golden bars gleams the glory of their future.

Turning, the file of priests led us into Morab, our entrancingly beautiful home. Only Zuren was downcast. "I like it not, my friend," he murmured. "All is beautiful, except the shadows of the wings of the people of darkness; and they hover over you and me. I am afraid."

"Afraid," I scoffed. "Thou, who hast faced alone twenty barbarians, and laughed in their faces? Thou art only tired, brave Zuren."

Through wide, paved streets we marched. Both sides were lined with lofty, picturesque buildings. We crossed and recrossed broad avenues, shaded by feathery palms; we passed row after row of shops where were displayed costly wares gathered from the four corners of the world. As we marched we were cheered by the throngs that crowded the thoroughfares. The men were arrayed in orange silk gained in traffic with far Cathay. In golden belts they carried daggers, the product of the smiths from the far north, even to the shores of the lake of Caspius, and the sheaths were literally incrusted in jewels. The women were of a beauty far surpassing even the women of the Pharaoh, and their loveliness was greatly enhanced by their simplicity of attire.

a simple, clinging gown, bound about the waist by a girdle of jade. Their arms, like those of the men, were bare, and their feet were protected by sandals fastened by crossed bands of ribbons of many colors.

At last we arrived at a wide and splendid square, surrounded by lofty palaces. In its center, circled by beautiful grounds, stood the stately temple of Chrios, and thither we were bound.

Across the broad, marble terrace, under vast arbors of magnolias, through a grove of orange trees and bewitching oleanders; then through a low-roofed stone corridor, lit at intervals by a few flickering oil lamps; then on we marched until at last, ascending a flight of granite steps, we entered the temple.

It was lit from base to vaulted roof with glittering lamps of all colors. Aloft, in the topmost arch, swung the great silver bell that first gives the glad news that Chrios is again upon his journey. The aisles were strewn ankle-deep with flowers of all the colors of the rainbow, and their perfume was bewildering in its intensity. Lights twinkled everywhere and there were distant glimpses of jeweled shrines.

But inevitably our eyes were led to the immense altar of Chrios. Before this holy of holies hung the wondrous glistening black velvet curtain emblazoned with the golden image of Chrios, the sun. To the left and right were great bronze braziers, swinging on chains and emitting clouds of incense.

We were led to the place of honor before the altar, and a vast crowd filled all the available space in the temple. Zuren's face became more than ever overclouded, and he whispered to me:

"Ro-Moarin, the black clouds invade the temple. The faces of the people of darkness leer at us from the dark corners. Ro-Moarin, friend, I fear for thy safety."

"Zuren, comrade, thou art weary and melancholy. We are among friends and loved ones. My heart sings with happiness. Tomorrow thou shalt laugh at thy fears."

How little did I dream of the morrow.

SUDDENLY there came a clear-blown note that echoed and re-echoed in the great dome. From out a side archway came a group of neophytes of Chrios, dressed in black and with but half the holy emblem upon their breasts. Slowly they marched to the lowest step of the altar and there they prostrated themselves. A group of children who stood near the incense braziers took up a chant:

O virgin priestess, chaste daughter of the Sun, how shall we praise thy peerless beauty?
Thou art the gate of paradise—thou art the true child of Chrios.
Hail Eldres, pure star in the heavens of the glory of Chrios.
Bless, we beseech thee, in the name of Chrios, the brave warriors of Morab.
Exalt Ro-Moarin, their courageous leader.

"Who is Eldres, I know her not?" asked Zuren of me.

A noble at our side answered.

"Two years ago she was chosen as high priestess, to take the place of Lyosa, whom Chrios took to his bosom. Thou hast not seen her, but soon thou shalt feast thine eyes on such beauty as thou hast not imagined."

As the children closed their chant, the curtain waved to and fro. Once more it moved and began to part in the middle. Very slowly it receded.

My heart almost stopped its beating, and I could hear Zuren at my side as he let forth his breath in a sigh that was almost a gasp. A fairer maiden—yes, one half so fair—I had never beheld. Eldres, lovely gem of the stately shrine, high priestess of Chrios! Ivory-white was her perfect

face, crowned with a mass of hair the color and sheen of burnished copper. She stood tall, yet slender, swaying slightly like an angel poised for flight. Her robe was white, with a silky sheen that glistened with soft opal hues, and on her forehead gleamed the great symbolic jewel.

As I looked my heart cried out. I knew the meaning of the breathless joy that had been throbbing through me—and I knew the truth of the strange forebodings of Zuren. Eldres, the virgin priestess, chosen since my journey was undertaken, was henceforth enshrined in my heart as the woman I loved with all my power—and not as the handmaiden of Chrios.

Then her eyes met mine of all that vast throng. A glorious pink suffused her face, and my heart leaped at what I thought I read there. Then slowly she stepped forward and began to sing. Her voice seemed to reach out in the quiet evening and gather up the drowzy sounds of woods and stream and drop them in my heart like rose leaves on soft sod. Gaining volume, I could hear the lap of water on the cool rocks, the pulse of a current that rose and fell, and through it all the note of undying love, disguised, I was sure, to all but me alone. It was my song—and Eldres was the singer. The words were praise of Ro-Moarin and his deeds, but love, sudden and undying, was the theme.

I know little of what followed. After the worship was finished, Zuren led me to my home, murmuring all the while of the black shadows and the cruelty of love—for he had read the secret in my face. Long hours he talked to me. Black pictures he painted of the wrath of Chrios at the audacity of man daring to covet his high priestess.

"I cannot help it, Zuren. My love is stronger than the wrath of Chrios. I will brave his vengeance if I may but see Eldres alone."

For days unnumbered we kept to the house, and day by day I became more melancholy. Food was distasteful, and company angered me. Finally Zuren spoke from his great heart.

"Ro-Moarin," he said, "Chrios is lord of all the universe; but greater than my fear of him is my friendship and love for you, my brother. I will this night go to Eldres and arrange a meeting if, as thou believest, she also loves you—and may Chrios forgive me."

Hardly had he finished speaking when there entered Azif, the massive black slave of Eldres, bearing a tablet inscribed to me.

Ro-Moarin, beloved—

Sacrilege it is, and fraught with danger, but I must again see the face of my beloved. Chrios forgive me, I love you, and you, I know, love me. Come with Azif—he will lead the way. Eldres.

Almost in a trance I rose and followed. Trees, houses, bridges, passed as in a dream, for my heart was far ahead. At last we stopped. Before us rose the white temple, and near the eastern side was a gate but slightly ajar. It was the entrance to the home of the high priestess, where man must never tread. Azif pointed to the gate and left me.

I entered and passed beneath a dark arbor. On I went for several paces, until at a sharp bend in the pathway an emerald light showed between the branches. There I stopped before a painted panel. It slowly moved—it glided back and a figure appeared—a figure of a woman clad all in white showed in the black aperture like the moon through a rift in a black storm cloud. It was Eldres.

"You have come, Ro-Moarin," she said in a low, tremulous voice, doubly wonderful for the emotion that mastered her.

Scarcely conscious of what I did, I knelt and took her soft hand in mine, and kissed it with passionate fervor.

"Eldres," I murmured brokenly, "Eldres," and waited.

"Then you do love me, Ro-Moarin?" she asked in a half-whisper.

"Love?" I cried. "Love, deathless and hot like the flame from Chrios! For one kiss I would brave the wrath of the sun god and all his priests."

I clasped her to me almost roughly, and my lips found hers.

Lost in the joy of love, we could not know that Al-Khibir, chief chanter of the priests, and versed in music above all others in Morab except Eldres alone, had detected the note of love in the song of Eldres at the temple. Knowing the heart of woman, although himself dedicated to Chrios, he had since been on guard. He had seen me enter the garden of the high priestess, and had informed his brethren. Even now he was watching, and the blasphemy had seared his soul. The priests knew that Eldres, beloved of Chrios, the sun god, loved the warrior, Ro-Moarin. But the people must never know.

Presently there appeared through the gate a number of half-naked men carrying axes—coarse, savage, cruel looking brutes. They were the temple slaves captured in the south and seldom seen by the Morabians. These were followed by four tall men in flowing robes and closely masked. Still insensible to the outside world in our first meeting, neither Eldres nor I knew of their approach until heavy hands were laid upon us.

Sensing what it meant, for I knew the punishment for sacrilege, I cried out.

"Mercy! Not for me but for Eldres, chosen of Chrios—my love—my life! Spare her, for she is innocent of all wrong except that of loving me. Or if you will not spare her, slay her with the merciful sword—give her not to the terrible sun-glass."

"Let be," said the leader austerely. "The sanctity of the temple has been outraged. With the sun-glass only can we pacify the wrath of Chrios. Eldres has violated her solemn vows and must die. You, Ro-Moarin, have aspired to the love of a high priestess, and must also perish. At midday on the morrow Chrios will claim you."

Well I knew the agony that awaited us. On the temple roof was set a lens some six feet in diameter. Directly beneath where the rays of the sun came to a point was the sacrificial stone. On it we would be stretched until the powerful beam reached the heart, and death came as a deliverance. Much grief I felt for my beloved.

Eldres was calm. A smile was on her lips. Presently we were being led to the dungeon, and Eldres began to sing the song—our song. My heart overflowed with love for the wondrous woman who tomorrow was to suffer death for love of me.

"Listen, Ro-Moarin," she said with bated breath as her hand found mine, "the gods have spoken to me. Chrios, himself, has forgiven our great love. He shall not take us, for tonight we leave this world without pain. They tell me that our love is immortal. We shall presently die, but we shall live again, and in that life shall know full happiness. Four thousand years we shall sleep as one—then we shall awake and my song shall call to you, my beloved. I charge you to remember it, and heed when it calls. Zuren, in that life, shall point the way. Take this leaf and swallow it when you reach the dungeon. I have one for myself. Now farewell, heart of my heart. We are parting."

On the lower step of the dungeon I swallowed the small leaf Eldres had given me. Then my strength gave way—my nerves seemed to snap like an overwound harp string—all went black.

(*Continued on page* 178)

IT WAS such a little thing, Père—*tel qu'une très petite chose.* Just a tiny birthmark on my breast.

True, it did have the look of a crucifix. But does Père find anything so remarkable in that? Why, I have seen on a girl of the village one in the form of Joan, our most blessed saint, all in full armor, mounted, holding aloft her sword. Right on her breast she wore it, too, as do I. They could point her out to you in the street of a morning. And yet none thinks her especially marked by the gentle Christ.

Yet when Father François, the priest, beheld in baptizing me what had been my lot at birth, did he not forthwith pronounce me *consacrée?* Ah, Père, yes, though had he stopped there, it had mattered little. But no, he must offer a blessing. So, dipping his fingers in the holy water, he touched me on the breast, above the mark, and said (I can hear him yet):

"Child of the Cross, I ordain thee to purity. Until the day thou art wed shalt thou know naught of the love of man that is of the body, neither his arms nor his lips nor anything that is his. This do, and the crucifix upon thy breast shall remain, as today, of brownish hue. But fail, and it shall at once turn crimson—and thou shalt know thyself no longer pure."

Little heed I then took of his words, Père. I was but young, and the thoughts of man were remote. So I laughed and played and forgot Father François' words.

Forgot them for a time, yet they had been burned too deep for erasing, and as I grew older they began to come back to me and I thought often of their meaning. Puzzled, to *maman* I went one day and she told me—many things. But even yet I was perplexed and (I must confess it, Père) I but half believed. Nevertheless, I kept apart, and the young folks of the village found me different and shy.

Then came Raoul, and with him—love. Yet not the love of which I had been warned. His was a different love, somehow, tender and fine, and I feared not at all.

He was of the city, and came to our little town to till his father's farm. Yet he was not of the type I had been taught to know and avoid. His eyes were gentle and his voice was soft, and I knew he meant no harm.

Indeed he seemed not to think of me at all except as in a dream, and I found myself marveling. For hours he would sit beside me, looking up into my face as though in worship—and I found my heart stir.

Was that love, Père?

Ah, well, at any rate it was beautiful—oh, so beautiful!

One day I was moved to tell him of the crucifix and, quite unashamed, I bared my breast that he might see. And as he beheld it, his eyes glistened

and they seemed to take on a wistful, lovely look.

After that he was twice gentle, and oh, tenderness made his eyes like stars. Often he would take my hands in his and sometimes he would stroke my hair and whisper the dearest words.

Once he touched my face, so lightly, so softly, and his lips trembled. My heart grew faint with wonder, and I leaned toward him, overwhelmed.

His hands shook and his breath came fast. He moved as though to take me in his arms. Another moment and he would have held me fast and kissed me—when suddenly he gave a little sob and held himself back.

"Ah, no, *ma cherie,*" he cried. "You are too sweet, too pure. The crucifix—we will guard it well, beloved. First you shall be my wife. Then shall your lips be mine."

"Thou knowest best, Raoul," I whispered. "I am thine in any way thou seest fit."

Then he took both my hands in his and poured out words, oh, so wonderful, Père. And I sat there thrilled as I had never thought to be.

That night he went to my father and our troth was plighted. We were to wed in the fall.

Then (ah, all the world knows!)—then came the war. . .

And he went away, Père, went away and left me, with a heart too full for tears.

Ah, how proud he looked in his uniform of heaven-blue! On the day for marching he came to me, and we had a last hour together, the most wonderful hour of all. Again he took my hands in his. Again he stroked my hair and whispered those dear words. Again he touched my face, so lightly, so gently.

All heaven sang in my ears. And how my heart beat! Ah, Père, love such as that was too rare, too beautiful for me, a poor peasant.

The time came for parting, and he lifted me tenderly to my feet and stood there gazing into my eyes so deep and long that I felt my soul reach out to him.

Then, of a sudden, he bent and actually kissed me, pressed his lips to mine—and was gone.

"Good-bye!" he waved as he walked off down the road to the *maison de ville,* where the troops were forming—"Good-bye!" and again, "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" I echoed, and, sobbing, I turned away.

But though he had gone, the memory of that first and farewell kiss was with me yet, nor would it ever leave me. It was like a great red rose, and oh, so fragrant and so sweet!

Later, from the roadside, I watched them march away, line after line of blue, like a great strip of the sky. And catching his eyes, I waved at him and he waved back. . .

Then he had disappeared.

I waited till they all were out of sight. Then I ran to the meadow and flung myself down and wept. From being so full, my heart seemed now quite empty. How I longed to hear once more his dear soft words and feel his gentle hands upon my hair!

But he was gone—gone.

Memories remained, however, and now they surged over me in a flood. I lay there dreaming, in the warm August sunlight.

Ah, Père, such memories! All the beautiful hours came back and bloomed about me, until I was in a garden such as only the wondrous fairies must know. And in the midst of all those exquisite flowers bloomed a great red rose—his kiss.

WHEN I returned home I was happy, and I knew that I had found the magic wherewith to face the long days until he should return.

And he would return! Oh, I was sure of it!

All the rest of the day I laughed and sang, and when I went upstairs that night it was with a gay heart. It was for France that Raoul had gone to fight—for France, and for me.

I sighed and turned to disrobe—when suddenly, chancing to look into the little mirror over my dresser, I gave a cry and went suddenly faint. *The little brown crucifix on my breast had turned to crimson.*

Oh, Père, then how vainly did I beat upon my breast, then how bitterly did I weep. But to no avail. Crimson it was, and crimson it remained, though I prayed piteously to the Virgin Mary and to all the saints. Nevermore would I be as before.

And all for a little kiss! Surely, Père, there could have been no harm in that. Would you have said there could be harm?

I knew not what to do. In my heart I longed to go to Father François and confess, yet I dared not, fearful lest he would judge me bad. So, too, I feared to tell *maman* and papa of it.

Then I kept it to myself, and grew morose and sad. Only to Raoul would I dare tell it. He would remember, and understand, and yet—what if he should not believe?

How the months passed I do not know, but somehow they dragged by, with the help of his letters.

Oh, his letters! But for them, I think my heart should have broken. They were so wonderful. All my flowers and sunlight were in them, all my hopes and dreams. And yet, there was that in them, too, which made me sad—for often he would repeat the words. "Guard well the crucifix, *ma cherie.*

How then was I ever to tell him? I grew hopeless. I despaired. And yet surely he would know—he would believe.

Oddly fearful, however, I remained silent. And I hid my secret well. High at the throat I wore my frocks and always when I undressed I was careful none should see. More and more I kept to myself, fearful lest by some accident I might be betrayed.

But my very secrecy awoke suspicion. Soon it began to be rumored about the village (for everyone had known for years of my curious birthmark, and of the blessing Père François had given me at my baptism) that I had had an affair with one of the boys from the city.

"Is it so?" asked chic little Marie one morning, as I passed her on the road.

Marie had had several affairs and seemed quite proud of them.

"No," I stammered, blushing until my cheeks were fiery, and would have turned away.

"Prove it, then! The crucifix—is it still brown?"

I stood there silent, tears in my eyes, unable to say one word.

Two more girls joined Marie, and they asked me in unison for proof.

"Come," they said. "It is no shame, one way or the other. A little affair—pouf! If so, what then? If not, but show us that the crucifix is brown, and we will believe."

With them it was next to nothing, but with me—everything. Oh, Père, my heart was broken. I knew not what to do. I turned away. Could I have done otherwise?

So they guessed—and before nightfall the town was astir.

"The *consacrée* has fallen," people said; "the child of the Cross. Oh, la, such is the power of priests!"

My father heard.

"Is it so, *ma fille?*" he demanded angrily.

I hung my head.

"It was only a kiss, papa," I whispered, "only a little kiss."

"Bah!" he exclaimed, and I saw the blood rush into his face. "The crucifix would not turn crimson for a kiss. Who is it? Quick!"

"It is Raoul, father," I replied. "But it was no more than a kiss."

"Tell me no lies," he cried. "A thousand times he must have kissed you, else he would not have come to me for your hand. But this is no matter of a kiss. Are you sure it was Raoul?"

"There was none other."

"Very well. Then I shall send for him. He shall come here and marry you. I will have no shame upon my door."

I beseeched him not to tell Raoul.

"It was nothing but a kiss, father, only a little kiss, like a rose. Do not summon him. When his furlough comes he will return and he will understand."

"Rose! He shall get his furlough at once, and come. I will have none of his fooling. To the prefect I go. A letter shall be dispatched this night. Meanwhile go to the priest—and confess!"

He turned and stamped out of the room.

WHEN he had gone I flung myself upon my bed and wept as I had never wept before in all my life, for, Père, then my heart was indeed truly broken.

But presently I got up and went to Father François and told him all.

"Ah, daughter," he sighed, "thou art indeed *consacrée* no longer. But do not take it too ill. Thou art still innocent, and I will go to thy father and swear to thy chastity before him."

"It was only a little kiss, Father—just one little kiss."

"Indeed, yes. I believe it was no worse. Come, we will go to thy father."

So I went out with him, and hope returned to me. Presently everything would be all right. Papa would understand, and Raoul, and all the townspeople. Raoul would return from the war and marry me, and we would be happy.

But when we reached my father's house we saw it was too late. He had gone to the prefect, and they had written Raoul a letter, which had been immediately dispatched. Even now it was on its way.

And oh, Père, such a letter! There was no kindness in it. It was so harsh, so brutal! And there was no mention that it had been but a kissing, only that the crucifix was now crimson, and that, having brought me to shame, he should come at once and marry me—or it would be the worse for him.

As he told us what he had said, I trembled, and though Father François laid his hand upon my head in pity, I was not consoled—for Raoul would never understand such a letter. In the first place, his proud spirit would rebel at receiving so stern a summons from a peasant, for my father was nothing more, while he was the son of a wealthy landlord. And in the second place, not knowing he had ever harmed me, and with no mention made of the kiss at all, he could not but be sure it was someone else.

So I flung myself down and wept once more, while Father François talked to my father. What passed between them I know not, for I now cared little what befell, since fate had thus conspired to turn Raoul forever from me.

Yet the words of the blessed priest must have convinced my father, for presently he came to me and, laying his rough hand as gently as he could upon my forehead, he raised my eyes to his.

"Daughter," he said, "forgive me. I am more sorry than I know. But all shall be well. Come, sit you down and write Raoul, and I will add a line or so. When he shall receive it, he shall come to you gladly."

So I wrote, pouring out at last my secret. And as he had promised, my father added a few short words of softness. Even the good Father Fran-

çois made a note at the bottom of the page.

Then we took it to the prefect, and he promised to send it by special post.

"But will not the other reach him first?" I faltered.

"Yes," he admitted, "but only by a little. Hardly will he have had time to read the first letter when the second shall be in his hands. An hour or so—no more."

We thanked him and turned away. But I was ill at ease. For what might he not think and do in the hour or so between the letters?

Oh, and what he thought! What he did! Père, I wish to live no longer. My heart is quite, entirely broken, and my hands—they are so cold.

THE rest is strange, even in the telling. I know not of such things. And yet, I could swear that on the third night after the letters had been dispatched, as I lay sleeping, Raoul came to me.

I do not know how he entered the room. No door opened, and no window moved. But he came, nevertheless, Père, and I waked up and beheld him standing there, looking at me with the saddest expression that I had ever seen.

"Is it true, then?" he asked in a low, strained voice, and his eyes had a lonely, far-off look.

I would have answered him, when suddenly those piercing eyes fell upon my breast, upon which fell also the faint light of the burning candle at my bedside—and, my night garment having fallen slightly apart at the throat, he beheld all at once the crimson crucifix.

"Oh, wretched God, it is true!"

With a cry he turned and vanished.

"Raoul! Raoul!" I called. "It was only your kiss—only your first little kiss!"

But my voice echoed strangely in the empty room. He was gone.

Next morning a telegram came from the front. He had died in a raid for which he had volunteered. They cited him for extreme bravery.

And a few days later our second letter returned, unopened. He had never received it.

Then came a letter from a friend.

"He had received bad news that afternoon," it read; "news that seemed completely to break him up. In fact, after reading it he seemed no longer to wish to live. So that when our lieutenant came around looking for volunteers to go out and bag an outpost of the boche, he would not be restrained from going.

"When the second letter came, just a little later, we made every effort to reach him. But he had already gone. And he never returned.

"There will be a cross for him, of course."

Yes, Père, the *Croix de Guerre*. See, I have pinned it on my breast—over the crucifix so red, so crimson.

THE EYRIE

IT IS too early as yet to publish the readers' verdict on the stories in our November issue, for the present number of WEIRD TALES goes to press before the preceding issue is on the news stands. We are eager to know which stories you, the readers, like best, to guide us in our future selection. This magazine belongs to you, and we are going to take a poll each month of your likes and dislikes.

Of the twenty-three stories in this issue, which one do you enjoy the most? Send in your choice to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. And if there are any stories that you don't like, we want to know which ones, and why you don't like them. Frank criticism is welcomed, because WEIRD TALES is a magazine for its readers. In The Eyrie next month we will print the results of the readers' poll of stories in the November issue; and the stories that win first place in your favor in the present issue will be tabulated in The Eyrie in February. We will also discuss the readers' verdict on C. M. Eddy, Jr.'s, "The Loved Dead" and C. Franklin Millers' "The Hermit of Ghost Mountain," about which we asked your opinion last month.

WEIRD TALES has undoubtedly printed a greater number of strikingly original stories than any other magazine in the same space of time. It has given to the world stories of such absolute literary merit as "The Rats in the Walls," by H. P. Lovecraft; "The Great Adventure," by Bryan Irvine; and "The Desert Lich," by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. In its columns have appeared such imaginative pseudo-scientific stories as "Ooze," by Anthony M. Rud; "The Moon Terror," by A. G. Birch; and "The Abysmal Horror," by B. Wallis; and such unusual and varied works of fiction as "Lucifer," John D. Swain's artistic tale of devil-worship in London; "The Phantom Farmhouse," Seabury Quinn's fascinating werewolf tale; "Beyond the Door," Paul Suter's shadowy tale of death and eery horror; and many others of striking originality and strength—stories that vie with Poe and Jules Verne, and take the reader into a land of fantasy and imagination whither no other magazine dares follow.

That there is a real field for such a magazine as WEIRD TALES is evident from the letters that continue to pour in asking that the magazine return to the news stands. Letters are still coming in, praising the large 50-cent Anniversary Issue (dated May-June-July), although it is four months since that issue was published. There are a few copies of the Anniversary Issue still on hand, and these will be sent to any address for fifty cents each while the supply lasts.

The following, from Charles Godfrey Osgood, Fitchburg, Mass., is a sample of the letters received:

"Permit me to express my appreciation of George Bayly's 'The Sunken Land,' in the Anniversary Issue. That was a most absorbing tale. The spectacle of a whole forest of trees endowed with life and predatory, octopus-like feelers was truly, to say the least, awe-inspiring. It reminded me, in a way, of that wonderful, incomparable tale of weird adventure called 'The Willows,' which I read long ago, wherein, though there was not a breath of wind stirring, a vast forest of ghostly willows is made to give forth a rustling sound."

We agree with Mr. Osgood that "The Sunken Land" was an unusual story. And there are others, too, that hold the reader fascinated. But we believe that we have even a richer treat in store for our readers than they have received in the past, for a feast of unusual stories is scheduled for the forthcoming issues.

Seabury Quinn, author of "Weird Crimes" and "The Phantom Farmhouse," besides preparing a series of "Noted Witchcraft Cases" for you, has a bugwolf story in next month's issue that will fairly make your hair stand on end. And Frank Belknap Long, Jr., author of "Death-Waters," is at his very best in the same issue with "The Ocean Leech," where a strange creature of the sea oozes over the side of a ship and fastens its suckers upon the seamen, in the shadowy lagoon in which the ship is becalmed. H. P. Lovecraft, author of "The Rats in the Walls" (what a marvelous story that was!), has written a number of fantastic bits of eery fiction for the next few issues, including "The Temple," a tale of ancient Atlantis and a modern German submarine.

Just to list the good things in store for you in WEIRD TALES within the next few months would take up more space than the editor has at his disposal. We can tell you only of a few of them; but we must mention the series of "Strange Tales From Santo Domingo" by Arthur J. Burks, who writes under the pen name of Estil Critchie. He wrote "Thus Spake the Prophetess" in the November issue and "Voodoo" in the current number. Powerful stories, these are, for Lieutenant Burks gathered the local color for his stories at first hand in the Black Republic and in Santo Domingo.

"The Lethal Lilies," a novelette by Arthur Thatcher, will be eagerly awaited by those who have followed the fortunes of the people of Teeheemen in the present number. It tells about the people of the Valley of Sleep, where the lilies have an anesthetic influence that puts to sleep those who come within the influence of their perfume. But the story itself will ward off the slumber that overcame the explorers in the story, for it is filled with thrills and surprizes.

The inclusion in this issue of the first of two cavemen stories by C. M. Eddy, Jr., gives rise to reflections regarding a type of caveman story which we have never seen in print, but which ought to afford opportunity for plenty of thrills. Why has not someone written of a fight between a Cro-Magnon caveman and a Neandertal man?

We get plenty of manuscripts dealing with fights between dinosaurs and pterodactyls on the one hand and cavemen on the other, but we send them all back because these strange creatures had disappeared from the earth before the first great anthropoid apes rose to the stature of manhood, according to the records of the rocks as read by the geologists. But Neander-

talers and Cro-Magnons existed side by side, and waged relentless and savage warfare against each other.

Our learned friends among the anthropologists tell us that the legend of ogres dates from cavemen times. The Neandertalers were so terrible and primitive and brutish, they tell us, that the Cro-Magnon cavemen never interbred with them, but killed them without mercy. And when a Cro-Magnon child strayed alone from its cave, and a cannibalistic Neandertaler stalked it, that was the end of the child; but the memory of those brutish and half-human people remains in our legends of ogres; for the Cro-Magnons were not exterminated by the nomadic tribes that afterwards entered Europe and peopled it, but intermarried with them, and retained some of their legends. Abraham Lincoln, some of the anthropologists say, had Cro-Magnon features, and was therefore a descendant of the cavemen who have left their art on the walls of the caves of Altamira and Cro-Magnon (mere speculation, this, but interesting).

How would you like a tale of the warfare between a Cro-Magnon (say one of the artists who painted the pictures of reindeer and mammoths which still amaze the tourist) and one of those brutish ogres, perhaps over a girl who has taken the fancy of the Neandertaler; and the Cro-Magnon artist follows the Neandertal man to his den, and—. But we have no room to tell the story in The Eyrie. We wish one of our author friends would write it for us.

We want to hear your opinion of the stories in this issue. Which story do you like best of all? Do you prefer horror stories, mystery stories, crime stories? Or do you like astronomical tales, or stories dealing with the possibilities of inventive ingenuity and scientific research? Let us know your likes and dislikes. Write to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, and tell us what type of stories you think this magazine should carry.

This magazine wants to print the best weird tales that are obtainable. It specializes in tales of the bizarre and unusual. Occult and mystic tales, and tales of the supernatural, which are taboo in most editorial offices, are welcomed here, but they must be unusually well done. Tales of thrills and mystery; unusual tales of crime; tales of terror and horror (but nothing sickening or disgusting); pseudo-scientific tales; tales of science, invention and surgery—these are the types that have gained WEIRD TALES its title of "The Unique Magazine" and built up our strong following of readers. Those who have followed the stories in this magazine feel that in its pages they can break away, for the time, from the matter-of-fact world about them and enter a land of fantasy and imagination. A solemn responsibility rests upon us to live up to your faith in the magazine, and we will not shirk that responsibility.

Letters are received each week asking for the August-September-October issue of WEIRD TALES. Because of the change in ownership and consequent reorganization of the magazine, the August-September-October number was not issued. Instead of that, in response to requests from all parts of the country, we have changed WEIRD TALES back again to a monthly magazine, so that you, the readers, will not have to wait so long between issues. The first number of the reborn magazine was last month's issue (November, 1924, which was Volume IV, Number 3 of WEIRD TALES).

So you did not get the quarterly issue for August-September-October because there was none printed; but the good things that were scheduled for that issue will be given you month by month—and there are a lot of fascinating stories in prospect for you.

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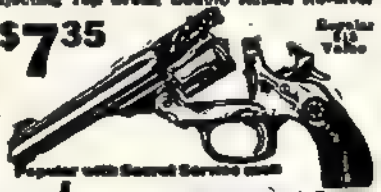

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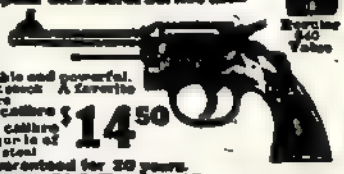

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THE SONG ETERNAL

(*Continued from page* 169)

3

I WAS standing on the edge of the pool in Dick Restouer's room, gazing into its crystal depths. Startled, I glanced about. Then I remembered. In five minutes I had lived a lifetime, and I had found Eldres, the singer of the song—the woman I love. Even now she lived and was calling. The melody pulsed through my brain as never before, as clear as the tone of the great temple bell. The words I knew, and they were calling me to love. I turned, and there stood my friend.

"Zuren!" I cried.

"Ro-Moarin, old friend, you have seen, and it is good news you bring. I can tell it by your radiant face. Today there are no black shadows. Once more you shall look, and," he smiled wearily, "I fear your interest in your mystic friend will lag."

Again I looked, and again I stood in a temple. Palm-thatched and earth-floored, it was filled with black men and women, naked save for grass girdles. With reverent attitude they faced a raised dais that was reached from the back by a grass-curtained door.

Again the priests chanted, and the words I could strangely understand. How startlingly like the chant of the children in the temple of Chrios!

O virgin priestess—
White as the moon flower—
Daughter of the sun—
Whose mother is the sea—
Sent in time of need to the people of Senecali—
We praise thy matchless beauty.
Hail, Ildira, pure star of the sun-ruled heavens—
Bless, we beseech thee, thy people of Senecali.

Then the curtain slowly drew back, and through the door came a white girl of iridescent beauty. My heart

jumped to my throat—I tried to call out but could not—my tongue was tied, my muscles were paralyzed. For it was Eldres in all her loveliness, clothed as I well remembered her, in her robe of shimmering white. Even the jewel was on her brow, and in her eyes was the same look of love she gave to me when she bade me farewell four thousand years ago.

She sang the song—our song. Ah, how it called to me! As the melody gained power she seemed to sense my presence. Perhaps my heart spoke to her—who knows? She stopped a moment, a heavenly smile wreathed her lovely face, and her arms stretched out as if to welcome me. And then the song again, and how the note of love thrilled my being! By superhuman effort I found voice in one word wrenched from my heart.

"Eldres!"

Again I stood on the edge of the pool, and my old friend Zuren—Dick, was holding my hand tight in his. Emotion overpowered me. With hardly a word I rushed from the room of the man who had found for me my love of forty centuries. But Zuren understands.

For eight years I have been in Africa and my search has narrowed down to two spots.

4

I LOOKED at Cap. Cap looked at me.

"Shep," he said in an awestruck whisper; "do you reckon then, that there could be any truth in the white priestess of the Swangali?"

"Listen, old timer," said Cap to the stranger. "Just twelve leagues to the east we have heard of a white girl who was captured by the Swangali in her infancy, and has become their priestess. She might be your Eldres."

Without a word the stranger leaped from his chair, slung his pack over his shoulder and vanished through the door.

Seur is the nearest post to the Swangali, and Cap and I are waiting to see if the marathon lovers turn up.

THE END

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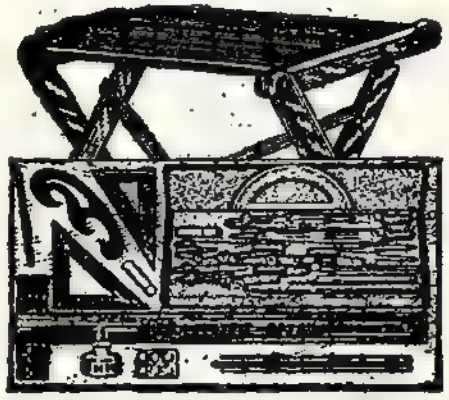

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THE HOUSE OF DUST

(*Continued from page* 155)

His sharp eyes had seen the contents of the chest.

"Miedo too late!" he hissed. "Thieves keep—jewels of the temple!"

He fell back on the mattress, and was still.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE CLEMENCY OF CLEM

KIRK crossed to the pallet and bent over the old Aztec. After a brief examination, he rose and covered the still form with a blanket.

"He's dead," he announced, "but we have no authority to move the body until the coroner sees it. Let's get the chest of jewels out of here."

He and Jarrell went at the task of digging and soon had pried the old chest from its resting place. It was a box two feet square and a foot and a half deep. It was very heavy, but they succeeded in lifting it out into the cellar and carrying it to the living room in the east wing of the house.

Kirk turned to Jarrell and held out his hand.

"I'm Kirk Hayward," he said. "You may remember me from the old kid days."

Jarrell gripped the hand.

"I should say I do remember you."

He laughed.

"And I'm mighty glad to see you here instead of in Clem Withersbee's chicken-coop jail."

He introduced the girls.

"Doctor Hayward and I have met before," said Elise. "We were implicated in a startling adventure last night."

But when Jarrell would have questioned her she pointed impatiently at the treasure chest.

"My story can wait until we have examined our find."

They made a thorough examination of the contents of the box. At a con-

servative estimate, there were jewels in the hoard to the value of half a million dollars.

"It seems like a dream," exulted Caroline. "I've often built air-castles around imaginary treasure hunts, but I never imagined anything half as thrilling as this."

"We'll have to hide it in one of the closets until tomorrow," Jarrell said.

He and Kirk carried the chest into one of the bedrooms and concealed it in a clothes press.

They had hardly finished the task when a terrific hullabaloo began outside the house. In the general racket were mingled the shouts of men, the barking of dogs, and the beating of clubs against the walls of the building.

"I do believe it's a charivari!" cried Caroline.

"Nothing of the sort," Hayward laughed. "It's the redoubtable Constable Clem Withersbee on his man hunt. He's going to take me for more crimes than there are in the calendar."

Jarrell went to the door and let the motley posse in. Led by the officially pompous Clem and "Doc" Satterslee, they tramped into the living room.

"Bar them doors," called the high-pitched voice of the constable, who was pointing to the entrances to the dining room and the two bedrooms.

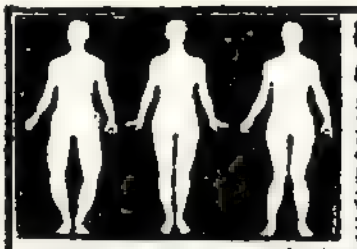
At least ten of his minions sprang to his bidding, so that there was considerable confusion.

Clem stepped up to Hayward.

"I arrest you," he hissed, "fer murder in the fust degree, fer assault and batt'ry, fer breakin' jail, an' fer breakin' an' enterin' this here house!"

Jarrell took a hand in the proceedings.

"Have you a warrant?" he asked. "You see, I happen to be a lawyer, and I don't believe you have much of a case against Doctor Hayward. As



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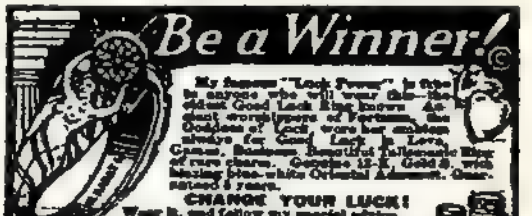

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far as your first charge goes, it is rot. The murderer lies dead in the cellar of this house at this moment."

Several of the posse were seen to cast furtive looks behind them.

"As to your second charge, I know nothing, but surmise a lot. And as to your other charges, they are poppycock. I am of the opinion that Doctor Hayward has more of a case against you for imprisoning him unlawfully than you have against him for breaking free from his unjust imprisonment. Better sit down, gentlemen, and take it easy."

Although Constable Clem felt the wind going out of his sails, he made a feeble effort to bluster on.

"I represent the majesty of the law," he proclaimed in a rasping pipe, "and I reckon I'll have to take all on you as accomplicements after the facks."

Hayward spoke up banteringly.

"Perhaps the rural Sherlock Holmes would be mollified if his keen eyes were allowed to see what's in the cellar."

Clem waxed angrier than ever.

"I doan' mind a-lookin', but I warn you I'm goin' to take the lot o' you. Show me the cellar."

None too confidently the posse filed down into the basement behind Jarrell and Kirk. When Kirk uncovered the body of Miedo, there was nearly a panic. Jarrell told the story in a few terse sentences.

Clem was dumfounded for a minute. Then his crafty brain conceived a happy idea.

"Why, this yere's the feller we been lookin' fer this long time," he said. "I arrested him myself here a week ago, but I didn't have nothing to charge him with so I tuk his finger prints an' let him go. Sho, the ol' voodoo that killed Cash Lamont."

He turned to Hayward rather apologetically.

"I never really 'sposed you-all done it," he offered, "but the law had to be

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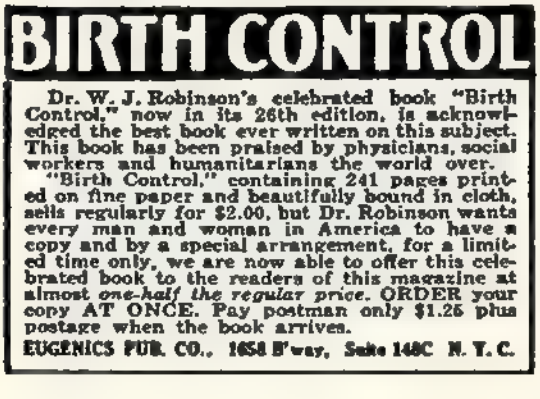
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satisfied and you was the only likely one to suspect. I withdraw my charge of murder. You can explain the other matters to ol' man Murchison yonder."

Murchison made a hasty disclaimer of damage.

"I reckon the 'Doc' done right," he drawled. "It want no place fer a narvous man in that jail."

Hayward acted handsomely.

"Mr. Murchison is quite right," he agreed. "He was a very courageous guard. It was only the presence of the corpse of the murdered man that made my escape possible. When Mr. Murchison was moving the body a little so I wouldn't have to look at it, I took his keys and got out."

Satterslee took charge of the body of Miedo, and with profuse apologies for their intrusion, Clem and his posse left for Crawford.

ALONE in the cellar again, Jarrell and Kirk did a little exploring that cleared up another part of the mystery. Back of the chimney they found the entrance to a tunnel. The hole in the wall was cleverly concealed by false brickwork, and it was only by a chance blow of the iron rod with which he was sounding the partitions that Jarrell came upon it.

They examined the passageway and found that it led from the cellar to the shore of the lake just below the high bank. By this underground way, Miedo had carried the body of his victim to cast it into the water. He had been able to get the corpse down the chimney and cover up the traces of the crime with his dust bellows while Hayward had been searching the grounds for Elise.

After the exploration of the tunnel, the young men went back to tell the girls of their discovery and to seek for further information in the rooms above. First of all, they examined

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the den where Weems had been slain. Under the coat of dust, they found blood stains. They looked closely at the lock, which, while it appeared rusted shut, had apparently yielded easily to the touch of Miedo. Both the bolt and the socket were free from the casing. The door was fastened by a decidedly modern patent catch.

The mystery was solved. Every point was cleared up. They went down to the living-room and gathered around the grate fire.

"It's nearly morning," Jarrell laughed. "We may as well spend the rest of the night listening to the stories Elise and Kirk have to tell."

"Yes, and to gloating over our successful treasure hunt," said Caroline.

"And to paying our respects to poor old Weems, who spent his life in

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Note.—The first chapters of this serial were published in the November issue. Copy will be mailed by the publishers on receipt of 25 cents.

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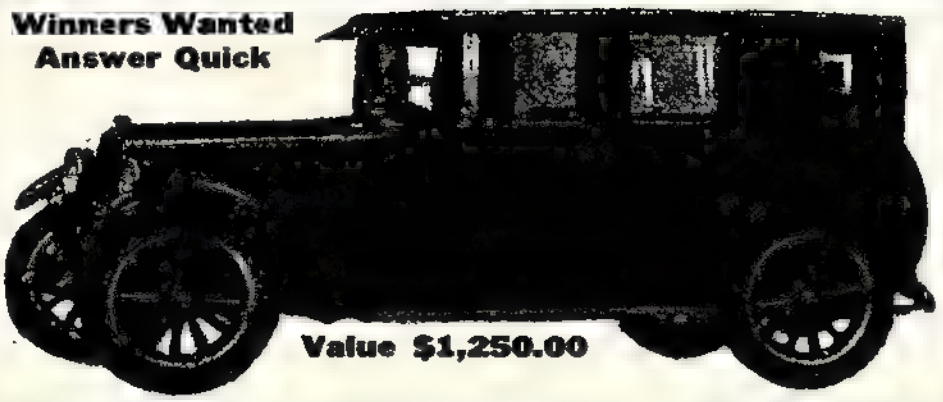

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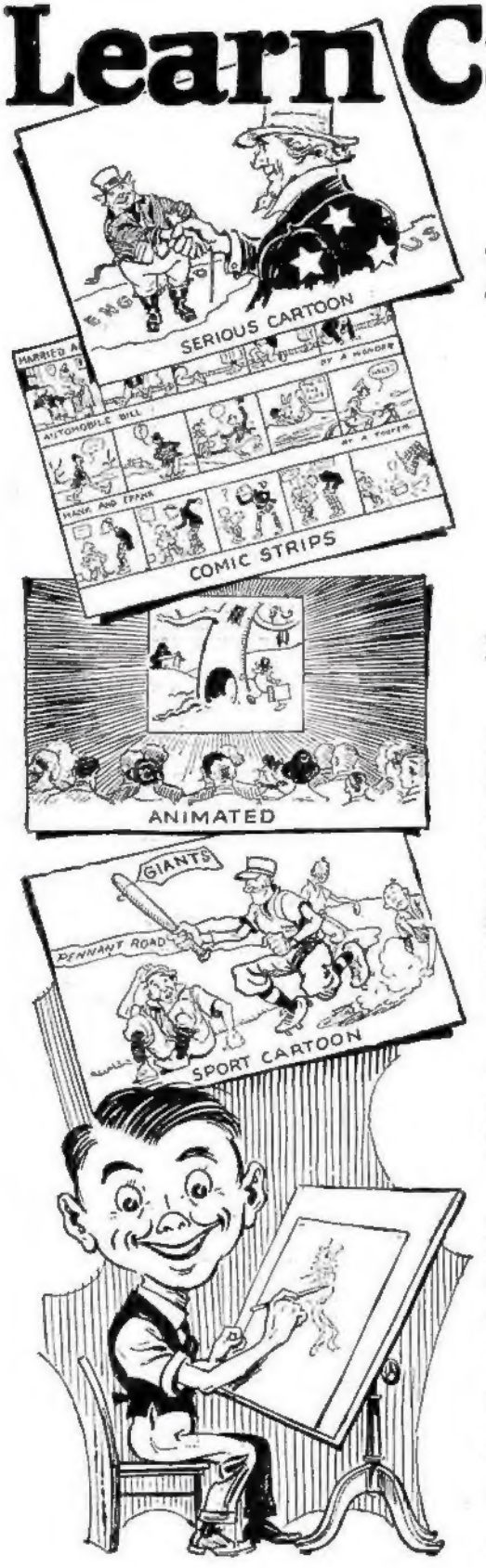

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